
Feasibility Study for a National Network of Women's Shelters and Transition Homes



by

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Executive Summary

Violence from intimate partners and homelessness are two significant issues that have serious ramifications for the lives of a number of Canadian women. Both issues have received considerable media attention and public concern, although in the case of homeless women, not necessarily from a gendered perspective.

The results of violence against women are not merely health concerns such as injury and possible lethality, but serious mental health considerations such as fear, depression and other reactions to the trauma of being victimized by a loved one. Being exposed to such violence also affects children and youth. From the early days of acknowledging woman abuse, the knee-jerk response has been “why doesn’t she just leave?” Increasingly it is becoming clear that a lack of affordable and safe housing has a significant impact on women’s decision-making. Can she find adequate resources to live separately from an abusive partner? Housing has been identified as a significant concern, one that not uncommonly can force a return to an abusive relationship (Tutty, 2006). For some abused women, leaving becomes a path to homelessness.

Homelessness has become all too visible a problem in Canada in the past thirty years, originally linked to the deinstitutionalization of mental hospitals across the country. While the early denizens of the street were almost entirely men, more attention has recently been paid to women and sometimes their children as among the homeless.

The institutional as well as the grass-roots response to both problems has been to develop shelters and transition houses to provide at least temporary safety and services in the hope of interrupting the cycle. Each Canadian province and territory has a number of shelters that both address violence against women and homelessness. There is little overlap, although a few organizations either house women with both problems or have separate shelters to address each. Indeed, the bulk of the research literature on women’s homelessness and abuse focus on the issues separately.

While there are admittedly key differences in both the populations they serve and the services they offer, what is clear is that shelters not uncommonly deal with the same women. Currently both the VAW sector and the homeless sector have only fledgling national bodies to address their issues, each faced with serious funding challenges. Even more importantly, there has been no venue to support a discussion of the over-lapping issues and possible mechanism to assist women and their families more adequately.

Domestic Violence and Women’s Homelessness

Women are especially vulnerable to becoming homeless because of interpersonal conflict. Since women are more likely to be in relationships in which they are economically dependent upon the other, if a significant disruption occurs, the woman’s home is often at stake (Tessler, Rosenheck, & Gamache, 2001). In Tessler and colleagues’ study, homeless men more often reported that the reasons for their homelessness were loss of work, discharge from an institution, mental health problems, and substance abuse. In contrast, homeless women were more likely to report becoming homeless because of eviction, interpersonal conflict, or someone being no longer willing or able to assist them.

Researchers have suggested that, while at least half of the homeless population has experienced violence and abuse in their lifetime, the relationship between violence and homelessness is especially profound for women (Clarke, Pendry, & Kim, 1997; Novac, Serge, Eberle, & Brown, 2002). Neal (2004) suggests that, for many women, homelessness is an initial solution to a lack of safety in their homes. Roll, Toro and Ortola, (1999) purport that there is research support for the “notion that domestic violence has a major impact upon women and often results in their becoming homeless, suggesting that many women would rather turn to the streets than face victimization by their partners” (p.195).

Women who flee the family home due to spouse abuse have little chance to prepare themselves for such a sudden and major upheaval in their lives, which may distinguish them psychologically from some of other members of the homeless population. It is also difficult to ascertain the number of homeless women for whom intimate partner abuse is a causal factor in their homelessness, because some women gradually slip into homelessness as a result of poverty and a lack of affordable housing (Novac, Brown, & Bourbonnais, 1996).

Wesely and Wright (2005) suggest that the relationship between violent relationships and homelessness among women is not linear, but complex and multifaceted. The homeless women in their research reported diverse experiences in their intimate relationships; however there was one point of convergence: their relationships “contributed to diminishing resources, social exclusion, economic vulnerability, and eventual homelessness for the women” (p. 1099).

The fear of homelessness may also be a significant factor influencing abused women’s decisions to remain with or return to an abusive partner. Sev’er (2002) stated that, “for some women, their escape means long durations of unacceptable living conditions or homelessness. According to Canadian shelter statistics, the wait for subsidized housing is anywhere from three weeks to five years (p. 320). Sev’er suggests that “abused women often provide a vivid picture of their fear of homelessness” (p. 319). Over 50% of the women in her study stayed in their abusive relationships because they were afraid they would not be able to access decent accommodation.

On leaving a VAW shelter, women are often faced with inadequate housing and financial support that leaves them with a choice between homelessness and returning to the abusive partner. Homeless women are commonly former shelter residents who failed to find adequate and/or safe housing (Breton & Bunston, 1992; Charles, 1994). Several more recent studies, one in the United Kingdom (Malos & Hague, 1997) and one in the U.S. (Baker, Cook, & Norris, 2003), raise similar concerns. In Baker and colleagues’ study of 110 women, 25 to 50% reported housing problems and 38% were homeless.

A report on abused women’s experiences with the Ontario welfare system (Mosher, Evans, Little, Morrow, Boulding, & VanderPlaats, 2004) suggests that inadequate social assistance creates significant barriers to women’s abilities to flee abusive relationships and to achieve safety for themselves and their children. They found that many women were spending all, or almost all, of their monthly social assistance cheque on housing costs, and had little or nothing left for food, utility bills, house repairs, clothing, and transportation.

To further complicate the issue, a recent study conducted by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC, 2006) suggests that abused women not only have difficulty finding safe and affordable housing, but may also be discriminated against by landlords who know that they are fleeing partner abuse.

In summary, although we have tended to treat homeless women and abused women as separate and distinct populations, the literature suggests considerable overlaps in both their experiences and their needs, housing being a key consideration.

The Current Feasibility Study

The call for proposals for this study was developed by representatives of the Housing and Homelessness Branch. It described the feasibility study as investigating the possibility of establishing a national network of women's shelters and transition homes. The finalized feasibility study consisted of in-depth key-informant and interviews across the country with an estimated 50 to 60 representatives. These representatives included:

- Provincial/territorial Transition House Association Directors current and past.
- Provincial/territorial and federal government representatives responsible for funding shelters dealing with both VAW and homelessness.
- Community agencies and government departments that address homelessness. Examples include the National Working Group on Women and Housing, selected directors of homeless shelters, the YWCA Canada.
- Selected directors of Aboriginal shelters both on and off reserve

The 77 key interview respondents represent major stakeholders with respect to these two populations (women affected by homelessness and violence). We were successful in engaging all of the provincial transition house association directors and representatives from the National Working Group on Women and Housing from most regions. Spokespersons responsible for services for violence against women for the provincial and territorial governments were also invited to respond and in every province at least one of these were interviewed.

The key respondents had impressive background knowledge with respect to at least one of the topics of homelessness or violence against women. They considered the proposed national network seriously and provided a wealth of perceptions, opinions, concerns and suggestions, many of which are presented in the following chapters.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The voices of the key informants interviewed for this feasibility study, those who work closely with Canadian women who are either abused and or homeless, have significant concerns about how to more effectively address the women's complex and significant needs.

This feasibility study may, in fact, represent one of the first times that the voices of the VAW and Homeless sector have been considered together. Although both groups of key informants acknowledge the overlap in the populations of abused women and homeless women, these women also have distinct issues that merit attention. Further, the agencies that provide assistance are generally different and are funded by different

provincial/territorial and federal departments. While some VAW shelter associations have also taken on responsibility for homelessness in their jurisdictions, and some organizations, such as YWCA Canada, offer shelters that address both issues (albeit often separately), there has been little opportunity for dialogue between these constituents.

The process of considering the needs and services for homeless women and abused women together during the interview was unfamiliar to the majority of the key informants, whose work steeps them in the issues of one population or the other. Looking more broadly at the question of developing a national network for women's shelters and transition houses entails understanding both the common and the diverse needs of both populations. This created a paradigm shift for some who originally saw few benefits in the proposed national network and, as they considered the possibilities, became more positive about what such a network could accomplish.

The key stakeholders who volunteered their time and ideas for the current study have extensive experience and expertise in their respective sectors, many having worked for decades. They clarified that the issues are serious, that they have been segregated by necessity because of different funders and services that are structured significantly differently.

The literature review on women's homelessness and intimate partner violence confirmed that the research on these two groups is relatively separate. Importantly, though, the few studies that asked questions with respect to housing problems for abused women (Baker, Cook & Norris, 2003; Breton & Bunston, 1992; Charles, 1994; Malos & Hague, 1997; Mosher, Evans, Little, Morrow, Boulding, & VanderPlaats, 2004) and recent or historical partner/child abuse (Clarke, Pendry, & Kim, 1997; Morrell-Bellai, Goering, & Boydell, 2000; Novac et al., 2002) found considerable overlap in their experiences and needs.

This overlap is supported by the perceptions of the majority of the Canadian key informants interviewed for this study. Defining abused women who flee their partners because of intimate violence to reside in an emergency VAW shelter as "homeless" makes the point quite clearly. However, despite overlaps, the key stakeholders also noted important differences, one being the state of vulnerability of women once they have become homeless. One consideration about which all agreed was that when women leave shelters for either homelessness or woman abuse, the lack of the availability of safe and affordable housing across Canada has reached crisis proportions.

While the focus of this feasibility study, the creation of a national association of women's shelters and transition homes that addresses both violence against women and homelessness is new, the recommendation to create a national association of VAW shelters is not. In fact the fledgling Canadian Association of Women's Shelters (CAWS) was created in 2006 to address issues of violence against women from the over 500 VAW specific shelters across the country. The need for creating such a national body was supported by the recently published YWCA study of 10 shelter sites across Canada (Tutty, 2006). While the Canadian Association of Women's Shelters has been meeting over the past year, it has not yet been funded. More importantly, several of the Provincial Associations that make up the membership have undergone closure or are facing funding emergencies that could result in their offices closing in the near future.

Similarly, other national and provincial groups may also face funding cuts. Shelters are acknowledged as an important Canadian resource, yet are also faced with financial insecurity. The context of the anxiety about being able to continue one's work is a layer that must be acknowledged in examining whether a national network that focuses on issues beyond woman abuse or women's homelessness is a focus that merits attention. When one's survival is at stake it is difficult to take on new missions, no matter how meritorious.

The Feasibility of National Network

The significant and urgent need to address homelessness and violence against women was highlighted in the findings of this research. The substantial overlap in the populations of these women was acknowledged. Further, the key informants identified the lack of availability of safe and affordable housing in many regions of Canada as a crisis that especially impacts the country's most vulnerable citizens.

The intersections of other issues with homelessness clarify the complexity of the world in which these women live. The majority of these women have endured historical discrimination and child abuse, as well as recent intimate partner abuse. The challenges for women who have experienced abuse and homelessness are intensified for those who are further marginalized by virtue of race, class, heritage, or ability. Many such women are Aboriginal or recent immigrants. Women may have substance abuse issues and be sexually exploited through prostitution, both of which can be survival strategies to deal with their extreme poverty and homelessness. Women may have also been diagnosed with mental illness. Overall, these women are the responsibility of numerous institutions in Canadian society: health, mental health, child welfare, justice, and social assistance, none of which directly address their lack of housing. Yet each institution has an impact on whether she can access the secure housing base she needs in the hope of stabilizing her life.

Would creating a national network of women's shelter and transition housing with a dual focus on women's homelessness and violence make a difference? A minority of the 77 key informants saw little or no merit in creating a network focusing on the dual issues of women's homelessness and women's abuse by intimate partners. Another six were originally sceptical but became more positive as the interview progressed. While not dismissing the opinions of these individuals, the majority saw significant advantages in supporting the creation of such a network. That six of the ten respondents that did not support the network were representatives from provincial governments (3 in housing, 3 in the VAW sector) is instructive.

As conceived by the key informants, the mandate of the group would be networking to improve capacity, share best practices, challenges, and inform policy. The mandate would be committed to the principles of inclusivity, with an anti-oppressive and anti-racist integrated framework. Collecting and sharing data on their clients would be a central focus that would advance not only our knowledge of the needs of clients but also how better to serve them. The idea is not to raise expectations that the VAW sector should become experts in helping homeless women or that those in the homeless sector become VAW experts, but that sharing best practices, concerns and policy debates could improve services.

The network would provide a venue for these discussions that does not currently exist. This is particularly important for those in the homeless sector that have few opportunities to consult about women's special needs and programs.

The hope expressed by the key informants was for sufficient funding for a national office and at least one staff member. While technology would be a central feature in the on-going communication, face-to face meetings of both the entire group and the executive would probably be necessary on an annual basis. While neither provincial nor federal government representatives would be members of the network, they would have a place at the table for consultations and mutual discussions.

The key stakeholders were emphatic that any funding to support a national network should not come from existing monies for direct services. The shelters for both VAW and homelessness have significant resource challenges and are "chronically under-funded". They do not have the capacity to support a national network on their own, no matter how important the initiative could ultimately be.

However, no clear consensus emerged about how the network would be configured. Several options are apparent but each involves the need for consultation among the key stakeholders. The central players for each model, however, are essentially the same:

- members of the Canadian Association of Women's Shelters (CAWS);
- representatives from homeless shelters that are either specific to women or offer distinct programs and/or services to women;
- members of national, provincial or local organizations that have a stake in issues connected with abused women and housing women such as the National Working Group on Women and Housing, Sheltersnet, The National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence and YWCA Canada.

Rather than suggesting options with respect to how a national network would be structured, decisions that should be made by the groups developing the network, the following recommendations suggest a process by which the discussions could continue. The ongoing dialogue would assess whether the need to address these concerning and important issues merits developing a national network.

Recommendations

The feasibility study offered the opportunity to canvass Canada's key stakeholders and leading experts in both policy development and the provision of services to abused and homeless women. These interviewees provided a barrage of valuable feedback about the complex and significant needs of these women, as well as the strengths and structural barriers to better assist them. Taking the interviews from these 77 key informants into consideration, the following recommendations are presented for consideration.

Recommendation 1: Host a national forum to allow key stakeholders to meet and discuss common purposes and mandates with respect to women, abuse and housing.

The issues identified by the key informants in the feasibility study are significant and critical. Offering a two to three day national conference to continue the discussion could result in networking that impacts services and policies to assist women afflicted by homelessness or abused by intimate partners. This forum would constitute the opportunity to discuss the advantages and challenges of creating a national network of women's shelters, building on the perspectives of the individuals interviewed for this study (many of whom should be invited to the forum). Such individual discussions cannot substitute for the debate and negotiation needed to formalize any decisions about forming a network.

As the key informants highlighted, it is not the responsibility of government to create a national network—that must come from the non-profit sector and the agencies that provide direct services and would constitute the membership. However government support in partially or fully funding the forum is justified, given that the outcomes could have national significance in improving the lives of women with respect to the overlapping issues of violence and homelessness.

The forum could be utilized to facilitate discussion about the many configurations that a national network could take, as well as deciding about core issues such as mandate. The forum would be instructive in any decision to support such a network. It could include representatives from VAW and homeless shelters with women's programming, as well as other national groups such as the National Working Group on Women and Housing, to name a few. Those planning the forum could consider also inviting the provincial government representatives from both VAW and housing sectors, especially since as a whole, these were the key informants with the least support for creating a national strategy. Hearing the joint and overlapping issues might create a greater appreciation for the potential of such a network.

Recommendation 2: Develop action plans to assist the provinces/territories in acknowledging and addressing the joint issues of housing for abused and homeless women.

One of the central activities that could logically take place at the national forum could be to create action plans within each provincial/territorial jurisdiction that are crafted to fit within the mandate of that region. While developing a national strategy is critical, practically the province/territories share the responsibility to address both housing and violence against women.

In addition to considering creating a national strategy, it would be advantageous to strategize about how to engage the provincial/territorial government representatives and shelters for woman abuse and women's homelessness in meaningful dialogue to improve services for women in need. The cross jurisdictional nature of the issue is becoming more complicated as provinces such as Alberta and Ontario have turned the responsibility for housing over to municipalities. When this is the reality, how can the housing needs of women be addressed? What are the changing and respective roles of the federal governments, the provincial/territorial governments, municipal governments, and how can the critical needs of communities be heard? This action planning process could consolidate the learnings from the national network feasibility study and the national forum.

The action planning would involve community and provincial organizations with expertise in issues of woman abuse and women's homelessness strategizing about how to more effectively partner with provincial/territorial and federal government representatives to move forward the agenda of combating homelessness. This recommendation fits well within the government's new Homelessness Partnering Strategy, specifically addressing two of the key objectives: "consultation with stakeholders from the private and non-profit sectors and listening to their concerns" and "providing greater access to support networks appropriate to individual needs of homeless people" (December 19, 2006, press release on Canada's New Government's Homelessness Partnering Strategy).

Perhaps the suggestion merits a pilot project to assess the advantages of funding a provincial /territorial staff person in one or two provinces with the goal of furthering the action plans given the clear link to the Homelessness Partnering Strategy. The staff person, could, as one option, work out of the office of the Provincial Association of Shelters and Transition Houses in that region.

Recommendation 3: Support the already existing initiatives that currently address issues and services for abused and homeless women.

The feedback from the majority of key informants is that a national network to address women's issues of homelessness and abuse would address the significant gaps and disconnect between currently available services and shelters for homeless and abused women. Notably, however, currently existing national organizations such as the Canadian Association of Women's Shelters and the National Working Group on Women and Housing, YWCA of Canada and Shelternet, to name a few, are already addressing key aspects of the work that a national network of women's shelters could address, although none holistically address both issues. If such a network were established, these organizations would be the most obvious choices to take the lead in establishing a national network.

As mentioned, several of these organizations face their own funding challenges and crises. The extent to which their issues intersect with significant concerns about housing needs to be acknowledged, which would facilitate the possibility of their being eligible for governmental financial support.

Conclusions

In summary, it has been a privilege to facilitate this unique discussion. As presented by the key informants, the complexity of the issues for homeless women and those abused by intimate partners are overwhelming and the current institutional response simply inadequate. How can we more effectively meet the urgent needs of these women to assist them to leave abusive partners and create safe new homes for themselves and their children?

The key respondents in this study raise compelling questions and present tragic stories. How best to support them in their dedication to make a difference in the lives of these women? Creating a national network of women's shelters and transition houses seems a logical and important first step.

Chapter One: Women, Abuse and Homelessness in Canada

Violence from intimate partners and homelessness are two significant issues that have serious ramifications for the lives of a number of Canadian women. Both issues have received considerable media attention and public concern, although in the case of homeless women, not necessarily from a gendered perspective.

The results of violence against women are not merely health concerns such as injury and possible lethality, but serious mental health considerations such as fear, depression and other reactions to the trauma of being victimized by a loved one. Being exposed to such violence also affects children and youth. From the early days of acknowledging woman abuse, the knee-jerk response has been “why doesn’t she just leave?” Increasingly it is becoming clear that a lack of affordable and safe housing has a significant impact on women’s decision-making. Can she find adequate resources to live separately from an abusive partner? Housing has been identified as a significant concern, one that not uncommonly can force a return to an abusive relationship (Tutty, 2006). For some abused women, leaving becomes a path to homelessness.

Homelessness has become all too visible a problem in Canada in the past thirty years, originally linked to the deinstitutionalization of mental hospitals across the country. While the early denizens of the street were almost entirely men, more attention has recently been paid to women and sometimes women and their children as among the homeless.

The institutional as well as the grass-roots response to both problems has been to develop shelters and transition houses to provide at least temporary safety and services in the hope of interrupting the cycle. Each Canadian province and territory has a number of shelters that both address violence against women and homelessness. There is little overlap, although a few organizations either house women with both problems or have separate shelters to address each. Indeed, the bulk of the research literature on women’s homelessness and abuse focus on the issues separately.

While there are admittedly key differences in both the populations they serve and the services they offer, what is clear is that shelters not uncommonly deal with the same women. Currently both the VAW sector and the homeless sector have only fledgling national bodies to address their issues, each faced with serious funding challenges. Even more importantly, there has been no venue to support a discussion of the over-lapping issues and possible mechanism to assist women and their families more adequately.

This document presents the results of a feasibility study funded by Canada’s Housing and Homelessness Branch to discern whether creating a national network for women’s shelters and transition houses could broaden the discourse on these two substantial women’s issues to ultimately more effectively meet the needs of women affected by abuse and homelessness.

Context for the Feasibility Study

On March 23rd and 24th, 2006, representatives from the Provincial Transition House Associations for Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters and the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) met in St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador. During their discussions, the participants acknowledged the advantages of

creating a national network of women's shelters and transition houses. The goals of such an association would be to improve the services, their capacity to share information and the lives of the women and children with whom they work.

The idea of creating such a national network for shelters that address violence against women is not new, having been documented by the provincial directors of VAW transition house associations in interviews conducted by Tutty in 1999 in a report for Health Canada. As part of the process of two recent national research projects initiated by YWCA Canada (Tutty, 2006; Goard & Tutty, 2003), most of the directors of the provincial transition house associations participated at one of two meetings (June 2006 in Ottawa and April 2003 in Calgary). At these meetings, the YWCA national study report results were presented and the transition house association directors invited to share details of their provinces' successes and challenges. Opportunities for such national meetings have been rare and the discussion highlighted the importance of creating opportunities to work jointly to maximize the efficacy of shelter organizations, arguably the central Canadian societal response to woman abuse when considering both residential, outreach and follow-up and prevention programs.

However, the feasibility of creating such a network, especially with a broader focus on homeless women and acknowledging the network of Aboriginal shelters both on and off reserve, has not been seriously addressed until now. This is an exciting and important opportunity since there has been no venue for the provincial VAW associations and homeless shelters to share ideas and best practices and problem solve around common dilemmas.

This feasibility study offered a unique opportunity to investigate the advantages and challenges of creating a national network of shelters. The Research Advisory team has extensive experience conducting both feasibility studies and working with organizations that address woman abuse. Since many homeless women have been victims of violence, there are important overlaps in at least some of their experiences and concerns and how these are addressed by both VAW and homeless shelters. We have also conducted considerable research with marginalized populations such as Aboriginal, immigrant and homeless women and understand the importance of reflecting diversity in both the research methodology and analysis of results.

This chapter presents the results of a literature review about the Canadian context of women who are homeless and women abused by intimate partners and the shelter services developed to meet their needs. The review is important background context to the major focus of this document: a feasibility study of creating a national network of women's shelters and transition houses.

Homelessness in Canada

Estimates suggest that one billion people are poorly-housed world-wide, and 100 million are living on the street (Begin, Casavant, & Miller Chenier 1999). However, homelessness is a problem not confined to the world's poorest nations. The wealthiest nations in the Western world also have significant numbers of individuals with no stable housing. Fifteen years ago in the United States, the numbers of homeless people were estimated at one to three million (Coates, 1990, cited in Rokach, 2005).

Despite attempts to count the number of homeless people in Canada, there is no official government data on homelessness. In urban centres it appears that the problem of homelessness has increased, but no one in Canada has been able to adequately measure how many people are actually living on the streets (National Homeless Initiative, 2004).

In 1987, the Canadian Council on Social Development made the first attempt to measure numbers of homeless people by sending surveys to staff of homeless shelters. While this study reported between 130,000 and 250,000 homeless in Canada, these numbers are considered an underestimation of the actual population since many of the homeless do not use shelters. Statistics Canada also attempted to measure the numbers of homeless in 1991, but did not publish the results as they lacked confidence in the quality of the data (Begin et al., 1999). Individual Canadian cities have provided counts of the numbers of homeless in their municipalities – for example, it was reported that 26,000 people in Toronto used the shelter network in 1996. A recent CBC news item (January 9, 2007) reported the number of homeless in Calgary in May 2006 was 3400 – up 32% from 2004.

In 1999, the government of Canada launched the National Homeless Initiative (NHI), to assist Canadian communities in their efforts to support homeless individuals and families to achieve and maintain self-sufficiency. The initiative funds collaborative community projects and programs aimed at long term and preventive programs to tackle the problem of homelessness. The Homeless Individuals and Families Information System Initiative (HIFIS), part of the NHI, is a computerized management system that is provided free of charge to community stakeholders. HIFIS collects information about the homeless population who use shelters, and also assists shelters in their daily operations (from the webpage of the National Homeless Initiative, 2004).

Definitions of Homelessness

One of the challenges in measuring the numbers of homeless persons in Canada is the lack of consensus over a definition of homelessness. Definitions of homelessness vary from narrow to broad, and, thus, counts of homeless people depend on how broadly one defines the term (Begin et al., 1999). Some researchers conceptualize homelessness along a continuum. On one end is a definition that defines homelessness simply as the absence of a roof over one's head. Kelling (1991, cited in Rokach, 2005) makes the point that homelessness is not only rooflessness; it is not having a secure and satisfactory home.

This point of view is reflective of the other end of the continuum, and is similar to the definition of homelessness adopted by the United Nations in the International Year of the Homeless. According to the UN, homeless people include those living in dwellings that do not meet “the basic criteria considered essential for health and human and social development”, including, “secure occupancy, protection against bad weather, personal security, as well as access to sanitary facilities and potable water, education, work and health services” (Begin et al., 1999, p. 4).

Theoretically, most Canadian researchers concur with the UN definition. However, in practical terms, it is very difficult to measure the numbers of Canadians whose housing is inadequate (Begin et al., 1999). Instead, most researchers attempt to measure the numbers of people without shelter. Even then, it remains challenging to

connect with and estimate the numbers of Canadians who are mobile, without a fixed address.

According to the National Homeless Initiative (2004), “homelessness is considered to be any person, family or household that has no fixed address or security of housing tenure”. It is important to acknowledge, however, that statistics gathered according to this definition do not represent the gravity of the homeless situation in Canada (Begin et al., 1999) because large numbers of individuals are living in inadequate or unsafe housing conditions.

Several researchers have conceptualized the homeless as fitting into three categories. The “chronically homeless” are severely marginalized in society and often have substance abuse problems or mental illness. Secondly, “cyclically homeless” individuals have become homeless due to an event in their lives, such as the loss of employment, a move, hospitalization, or imprisonment. Other cyclically homeless people include those who use temporary or emergency shelters or soup kitchens for reasons such as family violence. Finally, the “temporarily homeless” are without shelter for fairly short periods of time, losing their homes as a result of disasters, for example. This category also includes individuals whose economic and/or personal circumstances change temporarily (Begin et al., 1999).

Who are the Homeless in Canada?

Given these definitional debates and acknowledging the difficulties in conducting research to estimate the extent of homelessness in Canada, what do we know of the homeless population? Stereotypes of the homeless are that they mostly comprise older men with alcohol abuse or mental health problems. However, this traditional image does not adequately represent the population of homeless people today, nor has it for over a decade. O’Reilly-Fleming (1993, cited in Rokach, 2005) stated that the Canadian homeless “are overwhelmingly average, drawn from all walks of life, all social and economic strata, males and females, singles and families, young children and old (and) from a wide cross-section of ethnic and racial backgrounds” (p. 100).

According to Begin et al. (1999), women, youth, Aboriginal/First Nations peoples and families have, until recently, been underrepresented in portraits of who constitutes the homeless. Each will be addressed in the following discussion.

How often are women among the homeless? In a study published in 1987, Fournier (cited in Begin et al., 1999) estimated that women represent 30% of the homeless population. This figure is likely an underestimate since studies of the homeless typically count the number of people using services, and women tend not to use services for the homeless as frequently as men (likely because the services have typically more been geared toward men). Homeless women may not be as visible, as they tend to care more for their appearance than do men (Novac, Brown, & Bourbonnais, 1996). Since the streets are so unsafe for homeless women, they may also not be as visible because they find temporary accommodation with men in exchange for sexual and/or domestic services (Novac et al., 1996).

Neal (2004) suggests that certain populations of women are particularly at risk for homelessness, including Aboriginal women, both on and off reserves; unemployed and

low income women with limited prospects for future employment; women with substance abuse problems; women with addictions and disabilities who lack social support, women discharged from psychiatric facilities; women who have been physically or sexually victimized; and women such as sex trade workers who live in impoverished and unsafe conditions.

Homeless youth on the street typically range in age from 12 to 24 years old. Often young people on the street have been abused by their families, and may survive on the street by engaging in illegal activities and prostitution (Begin et al., 1999; Reid, Berman, & Forchuk, 2005). Many young people also reside in shelters with their mothers or both parents – one study reported that 11.5 % of the shelter population were under the age of 16 (Begin et al., 1999).

One third to one half of street youth in Canada's urban centres are young women. Many have dropped out of school, and have difficulty finding employment. Young women particularly at risk for homelessness are those in public care, Aboriginals, and lesbian women (Novac, Serge, Eberle, & Brown, 2002).

While it is a common belief that drug use amongst young people is a major factor in their becoming homeless, a study of homeless young people in Australia, aged 12 – 20, reported that only one fifth of the sample identified personal drug use as contributing to their homelessness. Another quarter of the youth used drugs only after they became homeless. Significantly, family conflict, if not family breakdown, was implicated in all the pathways to homelessness identified in this study (Mallett, Rosenthal, & Keys, 2005).

How often are Aboriginal and First Nations people among the homeless? Begin et al. (1999) reported high numbers of Aboriginal people among the homeless: 25% of the homeless in Toronto and 72% in Winnipeg. The major factors contributing to Aboriginal homelessness are high poverty rates, low educational levels, lower income levels, high unemployment, large numbers of single parent families, and poor housing conditions. First Nations women are also over-represented in women exploited through prostitution. Farley, Lynne, and Cotton (2005) reported that in Vancouver, 52% of a sample of prostitutes came from Canada's Aboriginal groups. Significantly, 86% of this sample of sex trade workers were currently or had previously been homeless.

Farley et al. (2005) suggest that colonization has resulted in extreme poverty for many people of Aboriginal descent. Youth who move to urban centres from the reserves, seeking a better way of life, are especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation. These youth find themselves both homeless and in an unfamiliar cultural environment.

In Canada, increasing numbers of families, mostly single mother-led, are homeless. In Toronto in 1996, decreases in the social assistance rates by 22% were believed by some to contribute to a 45% increase in the number of homeless families (Begin et al., 1999).

In the U.S., a 1998 estimate by Bassuk, Buckner, Perloff, and Bassuk suggested that families comprise 36.5% of the homeless population. Bufkin and Bray, (1998) proposed that homeless women with children comprise the homeless group most rapidly increasing. Page and Nooe (2002) note that, compared to several years ago, homeless mothers with children are facing a new set of vulnerabilities as a result of restrictions on

family welfare benefits. Only 55% of homeless families in their study received some form of social assistance.

Aside from poverty and a lack of affordable housing, social isolation also contributes to homelessness among families, who have exhausted all of their supports. Abuse is a significant factor in homelessness amongst single mothers. In fact, according to Begin et al. (1999), “families most at risk are those in which domestic violence prevails” (p. 21).

Factors Contributing to Homelessness

Poverty is a major factor contributing to homelessness (Neal, 2004). Sev'er (2002) argues that the cutbacks to Canadian social services that characterize conservative political and economic agendas, such as reduced levels of social assistance, child care, health care, subsidized housing, and other social security programs, have resulted in growing numbers of people in Canada who are “one misfortunate away from homelessness”.

Morrell-Bellai, Goering and Boydell (2000) note that homelessness arises from a combination of both macro level and individual factors. At the structural level, these factors such as poverty, job loss, lack of employment, lack of re-training opportunities, loss of public benefits, and a lack of affordable housing create a context in which individuals become vulnerable to homelessness. On the individual level, risk factors for homelessness include a history of childhood neglect, abuse, poverty, lack of social support, mental health problems, or substance abuse issues.

The high numbers of homeless people in Canada have also been attributed by some researchers to the era of post-deinstitutionalization of mental health services. As Stuart and Arboleda-Florez (2000) state, “critics view the high prevalence of mental illness among homeless populations as harsh testimony to a poorly functioning, fragmented, and limited community mental health treatment system” (p. 55). In their research, almost 75% of the homeless sample from Calgary reported some mental health symptomatology, with depression and anxiety being the most commonly reported symptoms (especially for women). One-third of the sample reported significant symptomatology – defined as four or more symptoms.

Forchuk Russell, Kingston-MacClure, Turner and Dill (2006) concur with this analysis, noting that Canadians diagnosed with psychiatric disorders are commonly discharged from hospitals to shelters or the streets. The authors suggest that “a number of systems issues, including a decrease in available affordable housing, a decrease in psychiatric hospital beds, and a shortened length of psychiatric stay, have all contributed to this problem” (p. 306).

While homeless men and women both experience severe poverty, lack of housing, and lack of employment, women are at a higher risk for poverty than men. The rates of poverty among adult women in Canada have increased over the past two decades, to the extent that almost 19% of adult Canadian women are impoverished (Neal, 2004). Women who are especially vulnerable to poverty include single mothers with low incomes, married mothers in poor families, and single women with low incomes (Neal, 2004).

Researchers have suggested different pathways to homelessness for men and women (Tessler, Rosenheck, & Gamache, 2001). In particular, women are more likely than men to become homeless due to the violent behaviour of others – especially intimate partners. Homelessness may have different health outcomes and consequences for women than for men (O’Grady & Gaetz, 2004), and men and women may also respond differently to interventions designed to assist people to achieve housing stability (Rich & Clark, 2005). The following sections discuss these aspects of homelessness for women in more detail.

The Consequences of Homelessness for Women

Those who are homeless are burdened with the daily challenges of survival, and their energies are focused on trying to obtain basic necessities such as food and clothing. They also face violence, feelings of being social outcasts in society, loneliness, depression and fear (Rokach, 2005).

Lack of sleep, poor nutrition, repeated injuries and the inability to maintain good personal hygiene are just some of the realities of homelessness that contribute to the overall poor health of the homeless. Researchers have reported that homeless people have high rates of medical conditions, tuberculosis, HIV infection, mental illness, substance abuse problems and traumatic injuries (Cheung & Hwang, 2004; O’Grady & Gaetz, 2004; Munoz, Crespo & Perez-Santos, 2006).

Women may be even more adversely affected than men by homelessness – especially if they are young (45 years or younger). O’Grady and Gaetz (2004) concluded that young homeless women are even more disadvantaged and vulnerable than their male counterparts. Even when young homeless men and women are engaged in similar economical activities, men are more able to earn money independently and to have control over their earnings than women. Homeless young men reported more satisfaction with their means of earning income than women, and young women are more likely to report experiences of abuse and humiliation as reasons for not liking their work. Other differences are that women are more likely to identify experiences of physical and sexual abuse as reasons for their homelessness, to experience greater health problems, are more likely to be depressed, are more likely to go without food for a whole day, and have less earning power in the informal street economy (with the possible exception of sex trade workers) (O’Grady & Gaetz, 2004). Jainchill, Hawke and Yagelka (2000) reported that homeless women in drug treatment centres were more likely than homeless men to have been sexually abused as children, and are more likely to have post-traumatic stress disorder.

A comprehensive profile of homeless women in the United States demonstrated that the severity of homelessness is highly associated with women’s health problems, as well as poor access to health services (Arangua et al., 2005). Homeless women had high rates of substance abuse, mental illness, and prior victimization. Forty eight percent had lifetime histories of drug abuse, similar to homeless men. Women with substance abuse problems used birth control services less often, and had more unmet medical needs. More severe homeless histories are associated with preterm and low birth-weight babies, greater gynaecological problems, and more experiences of being raped (Arangua et al., 2005; Stein, Lu, & Gelberg, 2000). Surprisingly, in Arangua and colleague’s 2005 study

homeless white women were the most vulnerable of the ethnic groups with respect to their health status. They were most likely to report three or more serious health problems than other racial groups, less likely to access birth control services, less likely to receive prenatal care, and more likely to report unmet health needs. On the other hand, another U.S. study conducted by Stein and colleagues (2000) reported that African American women who were homeless had more preterm births than Caucasian women, and also had the highest numbers of low birth weight babies.

A Canadian study conducted by Little, Shah, Vermeulen, Gorman, Dzendoletas, and Ray (2005) also linked homelessness is associated with neonatal risks for children of homeless women. The risks included increased odds of preterm delivery, low infant birth weight, and the delivery of newborns small for their gestational age. For women who are both homeless and have problems with substance abuse, the neonatal risks are even higher.

Individuals that are homeless, especially women, are at an increased risk of criminal victimization and the health risks associated with such victimization, since their income-generating activities tend to occur in unsafe places, with dangerous people, and involve physical risks (O'Grady & Gaetz, 2004). As highlighted by these authors, health problems become part of a vicious circle of homelessness, since health challenges make it difficult for homeless people to be able to attend work regularly.

Those that are homeless have significantly higher risks of premature death – especially young homeless women. Researchers have reported that the above array of health problems, combined with extreme poverty, have led to high mortality rates among homeless people (Cheung & Hwang, 2004). In Toronto, mortality rates among homeless women 18-44 years of age were reported to be 515 per 100,000; a rate on par with homeless young men, and ten times higher than their counterparts in the general population. In seven cities across North America and Europe, the risk of death among homeless women 18-44 years of age was greater than young women in the general population by a factor of 4.6 to 31.2 (Cheung & Hwang, 2004). Normally young women have a much lower risk of dying than young men, especially for those of low socio-economic status. The most common causes of death among these younger women were HIV/AIDS and drug overdose. On the other hand, while older homeless women are not at the same level of risk of younger women, they are, in fact, much less likely to die than older homeless men (Cheung & Hwang, 2004).

Canadians Stuart and Arboleda-Florez (2000) suggest that homeless people with a mental illness are the most vulnerable population amongst the homeless. They report greater hardships, report more life events prior to their homelessness, and more often face barriers to housing stability such as unemployment and low education levels.

With respect to women, Roll and colleagues (1999) reported that homeless women had more depression, anxiety, and other psychological distress than single homeless men, despite not having a greater likelihood of diagnosed mental illness or hospitalization for mental illness. The authors speculate that this may be because homeless women may be more distressed by their experiences of homelessness, or by the crisis that precipitated their homelessness. The homeless women were more likely than

men to have been recently assaulted, and had more contact with family members (Roll et al., 1999).

According to Bassuk and colleagues (1998), homeless solitary women are more likely than homeless mothers to have substance abuse problems or mental illnesses. Many of these solitary homeless women have children, but their children do not live with them. Approximately half of the homeless solitary women in their study have a dual diagnosis, such as a mental illness and a substance abuse problem, compared with 27% of the general population. Rates of psychiatric hospitalization among homeless single women in the U.S. are approximately 24% - far higher than the rates for homeless mothers or poorly housed families. However, homeless mothers are more vulnerable than poorly-housed mothers. Bassuk and co-authors concluded that homeless mothers are more likely to have depression and substance abuse difficulties than low-income mothers on social assistance. They also found that the homeless mothers had higher lifetime rates of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and substance abuse problems than the general population. The authors suggest that the high prevalence of psychiatric disorders among homeless and low income women is attributable to “multiple stressors associated with poverty” (p. 1564). They also propose that the high levels of violence experienced by these women may also account for the emotional difficulties experienced by the women: 83% had been physically or sexually abused at one point in their lives.

Homeless older women (55 and above) differ from homeless younger women in important ways, and they also differ significantly from homeless older men. In general, the elderly homeless tend to have higher incomes than the younger homeless, and do not cite domestic violence as reasons for their homelessness as frequently as the younger homeless population. They also do not report problems with drug abuse nearly as often. However, there are no differences with respect to the frequency of alcohol abuse among the elderly homeless versus their younger counterparts. The older homeless population also has been homeless for a longer period of time than the younger homeless (Hecht & Coyle, 2001).

Homeless older women are less likely to report alcohol abuse than their male counterparts, but more likely to report a history of mental illness. Homeless older women have also been homeless for a shorter period of time than homeless men, and report eviction as the most common cause of their homelessness. Older women’s homelessness is more often precipitated by crises than for men, and men are more likely to be chronically homeless (Hecht & Coyle, 2001).

Shelters for Homeless Women

Safety is a prime concern of homeless women. More homeless women than men voice safety concerns and a need to learn how to keep themselves safe (Herman, Struening, & Barrow, 1994, cited in Novac et al., 1996). Researchers have identified that many homeless women do not feel safe in temporary accommodation, and also feel very lonely. As mentioned previously, homeless women may find accommodation with men in exchange for sexual or domestic services, initially experiencing these relationships as more safe than the streets. However, the men with whom they live often exploit and abuse them in numerous ways (Begin et al., 1999; Novac et al., 1996).

A staff member of a Vancouver drop-in centre describes the violence in the lives of homeless women, stating:

More and more women are living in violent situations. The transition houses are always backed up. We have women who are living in really crummy hotels that don't have proper locks on the doors. It's a real challenge for the women and kids to get to the bathrooms down the end of the halls in the hotels safely. A couple of instances where women have been raped because a landlord refused to put a decent lock on the ... door (Baxter, 1991, p. 41, cited in Novac et al., 1996).

Men and women may respond differently to programs designed to assist them in overcoming their homelessness. In one study that featured a quasi-experimental research design, homeless men and women were offered one of two types of intervention programs: either a comprehensive housing program or a specialized case management program. Men achieved significantly more housing stability in the former program. While women in both programs achieved significantly more housing stability, the women in the specialized case management services achieved greater housing stability because women's time in stable housing was cut short by admissions to psychiatric facilities (Rich & Clark, 2005).

One innovative housing project for chronically homeless women in Toronto, Savard's, is a shelter unique in the sense that they do not impose expectations for treatment or medication upon the women, and there are minimal rules. The underlying philosophy of Savard's is that homeless women themselves will determine the pace at which they move towards independent living (Bridgman, 2001). Bridgman suggests that this model of sheltering homeless women is more cost effective than crisis intervention, psychiatric hospitalization, or incarceration, and provides opportunities for these women to develop trust in others and to re-learn skills necessary to transition from homelessness. Bridgman cites a housing activist's perspective, suggesting that the shelter plays a key role in helping to heal women "who in many cases bear long histories of abuse at the hands of fathers, brothers, husbands, and lovers" (p. 87).

Some researchers argue that, essentially, homelessness arises when there is a lack of affordable housing, and, therefore, one solution lies in increasing the availability of such housing. A U.S. study reported that the most powerful predictor of exiting homelessness is the availability of affordable housing (Metraux & Culhane, 1999). Examining a number of factors associated with repeated episodes of homelessness, Metraux and Culhane (1999) reported that the factor most strongly associated with avoiding repeat shelter stays was exiting from a shelter to one's own home. Even though their study identified a number of risk factors for homelessness, the authors suggest:

The extremely strong associations ... between housing exits and decreased risk of shelter returns offer affirmation for those who regard homelessness as primarily a housing issue ... This strengthens the argument for providing sheltered women and their households with affordable, stable housing as the first step in addressing other problems associated with them and their families. Although housing cannot remediate problems such as experience with domestic violence, for example, it can provide an atmosphere more suitable to addressing these problems, and it can

prevent a single homeless episode from becoming a series of repeated stays (p. 392).

In Canada, Neal (2004) argues that a central focus of the housing industry has been condo development aimed at the middle class market. There is little incentive for private developers to build social housing, and there are no sustained national or provincial housing strategies designed to increase the availability of affordable housing. Neal suggests that as a possible solution to this problem, governments could mandate including low-income units in all developments.

Neal (2004) highlights that homelessness is not simply a housing issue per se, as it is a multi-faceted problem related to conditions of impoverishment. In addition to affordable housing, changes are also needed to income support programs, to the National Child Benefit program, and to Unemployment Insurance programs. Morell-Bellai et al. (2000) concur, and state that “government funds for nonprofit housing must be restored and funding must be made available for retraining and adequate public benefits” (p. 601). They also suggest that a range of supportive housing options be available for abused women, people with substance abuse issues, and those with mental health needs.

Affordable, quality child care is a primary need for homeless women with children if they are to exit from homelessness, as is transportation (Averitt, 2003). Averitt reports from her research with homeless women with preschool children that “the lack of affordable child care resulted in the inability of the women to access social services necessary to get out of the shelters” (p. 91).

Stainbrook and Hornik, (2006) suggest that the needs of women with children in homeless shelters are similar to their counterparts in domestic violence shelters. When the two populations are compared, they have similar rates of mental health issues, substance abuse problems, and lifetime rates of victimization and trauma. Both groups also experienced similar poverty-related struggles. Not surprisingly, the women from the domestic violence group did report experiencing more recent violence. Given the fact, however, that there were many more similarities than differences between these two populations, the authors recommend that families at homeless shelters be provided with the same degree of support as those in domestic violence facilities. In particular, they highlight the need to address homeless women’s histories of trauma and violence – a service not normally provided in homeless shelters.

Sev’er (2002) concurs that the needs of abused women are similar to those of other marginalized groups such as the homeless, and that the government has “an obligation to fulfill the basic human rights and dignified living conditions for all their citizens, especially those who are the most vulnerable” (p. 321).

Women Abused by Intimate Partners in Canada

The serious nature of intimate partner violence and the harm not only to women, the most common victims of assaults that result in injury and are reported to police, but to their children as well, must be acknowledged (Statistics Canada, 2005a; Tutty & Goard, 2002). Best seen from a human rights/equality rights discourse, such violence is caused by substantive inequality for women around the globe. As United Nation’s Secretary General Kofi Anan recently stated (UNIFEM, Nov. 25, 2005):

Violence against women remains pervasive worldwide. It is the most atrocious manifestation of the systemic discrimination and inequality women continue to face, in law and in their everyday lives, around the world. It occurs in every region, country, and culture, regardless of income, class, race or ethnicity.”

Violence against women takes many forms including physical and sexual violence throughout the lifespan. A major concern of Canadians is women abused by their intimate partners. How many women are victimized by their romantic partners? The 2004 General Social Survey on Victimization (Statistics Canada, 2005a) estimated that 7% of Canadian women are victimized by an intimate partner. Of those that experienced violence, 27% were beaten, 25% choked, 44% were injured, 13% sought medical help. Perhaps most informative is that 34% of abused women fear for their lives in reaction to the violence (Statistics Canada, 2005a).

The abuse that women endure from intimate male partners takes many forms and typically extends throughout the relationship. Intimate partner abuse is different from the marital disagreements that all couples experience. The context of violent acts is typically control or jealousy. Partner abuse is not about anger in reaction to a dispute but the intentional and instrumental use of power to control the woman’s actions (Kimmel, 2002). The force and form of the violence far outweighs the import of the precipitating issue. Women are not merely pushed, shoved or slapped, they are beaten or injured. Every year across Canada, women are murdered by their partners as the tragic result of violence in their relationships.

The physical abuse of women by their partners often results in serious injuries and, for some, life-long disabilities. At the extreme, the assaults are brutal. In interviews in shelters in Alberta (Tutty & Rothery, 2002a), the women reported having had “lots of broken bones,” being “flipped over, smacked on the head and punched in the crotch,” being “thrown out of a car at highway speed”, having head or internal injuries. One woman’s partner deliberately broke her arm - another, after surgery, deliberately kicked his wife in the site of her incision. Such serious and degrading abuse occurs more often than generally thought.

Psychological abuse is always a factor when women are physically assaulted. The control and degradation of being emotionally abused by an intimate partner may have as strong or a stronger effect on a woman’s self-esteem and, thus, impact her ability to protect herself or her children (Dutton & Goodman, 2005). Psychological abuse entails making degrading comments and sexual slurs that target the most private and personal aspects of a woman’s life. Psychological abuse also includes death threats that elevate the risk of harm to a new level that must be taken seriously, especially if the partner possesses a weapon such as a firearm (Tutty, 2005).

Some abusive men stalk their partners, typically, but not always, after the women leave the relationship. Stalking is persistent, malicious, unwanted surveillance and invasion of privacy that may include following, making numerous and unwanted phone calls, and spreading false allegations. Estimates of the percentage of women victims of intimate partner violence that have been stalked are as high as 50 percent (Beattie, 2003; Mechanic, Weaver, & Resick, 2000).

Estimates suggest that one of five pregnant women are abused by their partners (Gazmararian, et al., 1996). Some women identify their first pregnancy as the beginning of the violence (Burch & Gallup, 2004), and during pregnancy the abuse is often more serious than before (Martin, et al., 2004). Abusive partners may target the foetus in his partner's belly or her breasts. Chang, Berg, Saltzman and Herndon (2005) recently identified abused women who were pregnant or in postpartum, as especially vulnerable to injury-related deaths.

Abused women are commonly raped and/or sexually coerced by abusive partners (Bergen, 2004; Campbell & Soeken, 1999). Sexual assault may result in serious physical injuries. In the context of being in an ongoing intimate partner relationship, the assaults are likely repeated, rather than being a one-time traumatic event, as is more often the case in stranger or acquaintance rape.

Society's ultimate concern for abused women is the risk of them being murdered by their partners. Fitzgerald (1999) conducted a review of 22 years of Canadian homicide statistics concluding that, "over the two decades, three times more wives than husbands were killed by their spouse (1,485 women and 442 men)." In over half of the spousal homicides, the couple had a known history of woman abuse. The spousal homicide rates for Aboriginal women are more than eight times the rate for non-Aboriginal women (Statistics Canada Homicide Survey, cited in Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women, 2002).

In summary, the nature of the abuse that women suffer from their partners is varied and pernicious. While focusing on physical injuries is important, many women endure years of intense psychological abuse that devastate their lives and the lives of their children. Most women are abused in multiple ways, each of which has a cumulative effect on their feeling trapped and ineffective in either addressing the abuse or fleeing the abusive relationship.

The research that has highlighted that women are at most risk of murder immediately after having left an abusive partner (Ellis, 1992), adds a new consideration that can paralyse women from acting. Leaving to a safe place such as a shelter may ensure her and her children's immediate safety, however, after she leaves the shelter her safety may again become at risk. Developing a safety plan during her shelter stay is a critical intervention. Even so, where she is housed becomes an important safety consideration.

The Status of VAW Shelters in Canada

The number of shelters in Canada has increased over the last decade and a half. In 1988, Gilman noted the existence of over 265 first and second stage shelters across Canada; in 1994, MacLeod estimated the existence of over 400 first and second stage Canadian shelters. The latest Transition House survey, conducted in 2003/2004 by Statistics Canada (2005b), was sent to 543 shelters known to provide residential services for abused women (with 473 completed surveys returned). It should be noted that not all of the shelters provide services exclusively to abused women, but also serve homeless women and those facing other difficulties. In the year ending March 31, 2004, 95,326 individuals (58,486 women and 36,840 dependent children) were admitted to these

shelters. While a minority of these simply needed housing, most (over 82%) were leaving abusive homes. This number was slightly down from previous years.

According to the 1999/2000 Transition Home Survey, most Canadian shelters offer in-house short term counselling (90%), advocacy (89%) and specialized services for older women (84%). More than two-thirds of the children residing in shelters were offered individual counselling (69%) or group intervention (54%).

The majority of the 473 Canadian shelters that completed the 2003/2004 Transition Home survey are “first-stage” transition homes, offering shelter for an average of three weeks. A smaller number, about one-fifth, are “second-stage” shelters providing accommodation for six to twelve months, typically to former residents of first-stage shelters for whom a longer-term secure facility is necessary because their abuser remains dangerous to them (Tutty, 1999).

A new trend in the latest Transition House Survey is that one-fifth of shelters (including general emergency and women’s emergency shelters) accommodate those with problems other than or in addition to abuse by an intimate partner. Several newer types of shelters include safe home networks, rural prevention centres to address intimate partner violence in Alberta and Ontario’s Family Violence Resource Centres, many of which were developed for rural communities where a full shelter would be impractical from a resource perspective. About 7% of the shelters were on reserve and less than half of these were emergency shelters. Nevertheless, utilizing networks and safe-homes without the safety provisions of a full violence against women shelter is controversial and the safety of residents and staff could be at significant risk.

Individual emergency shelters in urban centres serve 1000 to 1500 women and children each year, whereas in rural areas the numbers are slightly fewer. Of great concern is the fact that many shelters are turning away almost as many women and children as they are sheltering each year because they have no room to accommodate them.

In surveys, abused women rate shelters their most effective source of help, more important than traditional service agencies (Bowker & Maurer, 1985; Gordon, 1996); it is clear that the safety and support offered to residents have helped many to leave abusive relationships (Dziegielewski, Resnick, & Krause, 1996; Orava, McLeod & Sharpe, 1996; Tutty, Weaver & Rothery, 1999). Despite this, shelters cannot serve all that come to their doors, often sending away as many women as they take in or more. In recent statistics from three Alberta shelters for April 1999 through March 2000, a total of 913 women were admitted, but 6668 women were not (Carolyn Goad, personal communication) a ratio of about 1:7.

Shelter programs have expanded over time. Providing secure accommodation remains their most important purpose, but they also offer counselling, linkages to community agencies, crisis telephone lines, follow-up support for former residents, and training for professionals (Davis, Hagen, & Early, 1994; Johnson, Crowley, & Sigler, 1992). Treatment for children exposed to marital violence is now common, as are prevention programs and even programs to treat abusive partners. Unfortunately, most provincial governments do not fund these additional programs because they are not considered part of core shelter services (Tutty, 2006).

It is clear that not all women leaving abusive relationships require shelter services. The 2004 General Social Survey (Statistics Canada, 2005a) reported that only 11% of women who had experienced spousal violence in the past five years had contacted a shelter, with about 6-8% that actually used a residential service. The 1999 General Social Survey reported that 11% of abused women had used shelters: the majority stayed with friends or relatives (77%), moved into a new residence (13%) or resided in a hotel (5%). One conclusion from such findings is that transition homes are serving those who need them most, providing, “options for women who have few options” (Weisz, Taggart, Mockler, & Streich, 1994).

Recent Canadian evaluations support the importance of shelters (Tutty, 2006 [10 YWCA shelters across Canada]; Grasley, Richardson & Harris, 2000 [6 shelters in Ontario,]; Tutty & Rothery, 2002a; Rothery, Tutty & Weaver, 1999; Tutty, et al., 1999; Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 1994), and shelter follow-up programs (Tutty & Rothery, 2002b; Tutty, 1993; 1996) in providing safety and assisting the transition to a life separate from an assaultive partner.

On leaving the shelter, women are often faced with inadequate housing and financial support that leaves them with a choice between homelessness and returning to the abusive partner. Homeless women are commonly former shelter residents who failed to find adequate and/or safe housing (Breton & Bunston, 1992; Charles, 1994). Several more recent studies, one in the United Kingdom (Malos & Hague, 1997) and one in the U.S. (Baker, Cook & Norris, 2003) raise similar concerns. In Baker and colleagues’ study of 110 women, 25 to 50% reported housing problems and 38% were homeless.

A report on abused women’s experiences with the Ontario welfare system (Mosher, Evans, Little, Morrow, Boulding, & VanderPlaats, 2004) suggests that inadequate social assistance creates significant barriers to women’s abilities to flee abusive relationships and to achieve safety for themselves and their children. They found that many women were spending all, or almost all, of their monthly social assistance cheque on housing costs, and had little or nothing left for food, utility bills, house repairs, clothing, and transportation. Often women were living in inadequate or overcrowded housing. Mosher and colleagues suggest that inadequate welfare rates are a significant factor in women’s decisions to remain in or return to abusive relationships. One of the recommendations of their report is to “increase benefit levels to reflect the actual costs of living, including realistic amounts for rent, nutritional food, utilities, telephone and transportation (2004, p. x). They also recommend that more subsidized and second stage housing units be made available in the community.

To further complicate the issue, a recent study conducted by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC, 2006) suggests that abused women not only have difficulty finding safe and affordable housing, but may also be discriminated against by landlords who know that they are fleeing partner abuse.

Domestic Violence and Women’s Homelessness

Women are especially vulnerable to becoming homeless because of interpersonal conflict. Since women are more likely to be in relationships in which they are economically dependent upon the other, if a significant disruption occurs, the woman’s home is often at stake (Tessler et al., 2001). In Tessler and colleagues’ study, homeless

men more often reported that the reasons for their homelessness were loss of work, discharge from an institution, mental health problems, and substance abuse. In contrast, homeless women were more likely to report becoming homeless because of eviction, interpersonal conflict, or someone being no longer willing or able to assist them (Tessler et al., 2001).

Researchers have suggested that, while at least half of the homeless population have experienced violence and abuse in their lifetime, the relationship between violence and homelessness is especially profound for women (Clarke, Pendry, & Kim, 1997; Novac et al., 2002). In Clarke and colleagues' 1997 qualitative study, the homeless women with whom they spoke identified abuse as a primary cause of their homelessness, seeing homelessness as "an adaptive response to battering" (p. 490). Baker, Cook, and Norris (2003) reported that 38% of a sample of separated, abused women recruited from the welfare, criminal justice, and shelter systems were homeless. A similar number of abused women in this sample reported housing problems such as late rent payments and eviction notices. In this study, the predictors of increased housing problems included experiencing a greater severity of abuse, contacting less formal systems, receiving less informational support, and receiving a negative response from the government welfare department for assistance.

Neal (2004) suggests that, for many women, homelessness is an initial solution to a lack of safety in their homes. In one study, 61% of homeless and poor housed mothers reported severe violence by a male partner (Browne & Bassuk, 1997). Arangua, Andersen and Gelberg (2005) reported that 13% of homeless women were raped within the past year (compared to less than 1% in the general population), and 34% were physically abused within the past year (compared to 6% of women in the general population). Similarly, Wenzel, Leake and Gelberg (2001) found that one third of 974 homeless women had been victims of major violence in the previous year, such as being kicked, bitten, hit with a fist or object, beaten up, choked, burned, or threatened or harmed with a knife or gun. The authors provide two possible explanations for such high levels of violence: 1) that women are less protected from violence when they live on the street or in high crime areas, and 2) that their homelessness was precipitated by physical violence from a partner.

Roll, Toro and Ortola, (1999) purport that there is research support for the "notion that domestic violence has a major impact upon women and often results in their becoming homeless, suggesting that many women would rather turn to the streets than face victimization by their partners" (p.195). In this study, Roll and colleagues reported that homeless women with children had the highest rates of recent physical assault (in the past six months), compared with homeless single women and homeless men. The authors suggest that the children's fathers were likely still in contact with the women, accounting for the high rates of assault. For many women who flee spouse abuse, their homes are simply unsafe:

Under such circumstances, the concept of home as a place where one is safe is shattered. Home is a prison, a place that becomes more dangerous than anywhere else. This reality, perhaps more than any other, distinguishes battered women and their children from other homeless families and makes resolution of their situations even more complex. This issue is not one of finding a home, it is one of

finding a home that offers safety. The fear of being found and harmed keeps many battered women on the move. It keeps many of them homeless (Zappardino & DeBare, 1992, p. 755, cited in Novac et al., 1996).

Women who flee the family home due to spouse abuse have little chance to prepare themselves for such a sudden and major upheaval in their lives, which may distinguish them psychologically from some of other members of the homeless population. It is also difficult to ascertain the number of homeless women for whom intimate partner abuse is a causal factor in their homelessness, because some women may gradually slip into homelessness as a result of poverty and a lack of affordable housing (Novac et al., 1996). Wesely and Wright (2005) suggest that the relationship between violent relationships and homelessness among women is not linear, but rather complex and multifaceted. The homeless women in their research reported diverse experiences in their intimate relationships, however there was one point of convergence: their relationships “contributed to diminishing resources, social exclusion, economic vulnerability, and eventual homelessness for the women” (p. 1099).

In assessing reasons for repeat stays in a homeless shelter, Metraux and Culhane (1999) reported that domestic violence was one of three factors that put women at risk of repeat stays. Other risk factors were having young children in the family, or having absent children (children who were absent for at least part of the shelter stay). Metraux and Culhane suggest that young children put additional financial and social strain on women who are already impoverished, and they may be unable to escape the cycle of homelessness and poverty.

It appears that domestic violence contributes to a vicious cycle of homelessness, substance abuse, poverty, and unemployment. Salomon, Bassuk, and Huntington (2002) concluded that intimate partner violence is a risk factor for substance abuse among poor, homeless women. Women with histories of intimate partner victimization were more than three times as likely to use illegal drugs as non-abused poor women. In this study, the history of partner violence strongly predicted new habits of drug use, rather than the continuation of previous drug abuse (Salomon et al., 2002).

Other longitudinal research found that homeless women who had been physically abused in the previous 12 months were more likely to use crack cocaine at follow-up (Tucker, d’Amico, Wenzel, Golinelli, Elliott, & Williamson, 2005). Individuals with recent or longstanding substance abuse problems, in turn, report more severe homeless histories (Booth, Sullivan, Koegel, & Burnam, 2002).

Intimate partner violence has also been reported to adversely affect women’s abilities to maintain employment. In Browne, Salomon and Bassuk’s 1999 longitudinal study of ethnically diverse, extremely poor women, those who had experienced violence from an intimate partner were significantly less likely to keep a job for at least 30 hours per week for six months or more than non-abused women. This association persisted even when controlling for other potentially confounding variables. Moe and Bell (2004) also reported from their qualitative research that experiences of battering prevented or disrupted women’s employment.

The fear of homelessness may also be a significant factor influencing abused women’s decisions to remain with or return to an abusive partner. Sev’er (2002) stated

that, “for some women, their escape means long durations of unacceptable living conditions or homelessness. According to Canadian shelter statistics, the wait for subsidized housing is anywhere from three weeks to five years (p. 320). Sev’er suggests that “abused women often provide a vivid picture of their fear of homelessness” (p. 319). Over 50% of the women in her study stayed in their abusive relationships because they were afraid they would not be able to access decent accommodation.

In summary, although we have tended to treat homeless women and abused women as separate and distinct populations, the literature suggests considerable overlaps in both their experiences and their needs, housing being a key consideration. Do those who have worked in both sectors agree about the overlap? Would key informants from the VAW, Homeless sectors and Provincial/territorial government from across Canada agree about the need and relevance of creating a national network of women’s shelters? Is this feasible? Could it be an important initiative? If so, what would be the key advantages? What would be the barriers and challenges? How would it be structured? These questions are the core of the study presented in the following chapters.

Chapter Two: Methodology

The call for proposals developed by representatives of the Housing and Homelessness Branch described the feasibility study as investigating the possibility of establishing a national network of women's shelters and transition homes. The finalized feasibility study consists of one major research component, in-depth key-informant and interviews across the country with an estimated 50 to 60 representatives (determined by the Research Advisory Team and additional suggestions from the key respondents). These representatives included:

- Provincial/territorial Transition House Association Directors current and recent past (estimated 10-15).
- Provincial/territorial and federal government representatives responsible for funding shelters dealing with both VAW and homelessness. (Estimated 20)
- Community agencies and government departments that address homelessness (Estimated 20). Examples include the Working Group on Women and Housing, selected directors of homeless shelters, the YWCA Canada.
- Selected directors of Aboriginal shelters both on and off reserve (estimated 5)

The first project task was creating a Research Advisory Team to be involved throughout the project. The Research Advisory Team consisted of the researchers and Project Director, several representatives from the provincial shelter associations, one from the homelessness sector. The Research Advisory team met by teleconference three times throughout the project: 1) at the start; 2) to confirm the applicability of the research materials and methodology and 3) to consult with respect to the results and presentation of the findings. RESOLVE Alberta took the lead in drafting the interview questions, which were reviewed by the Research Advisory Team. The questions addressed include:

- What is the perceived state of housing availability across Canada?
- What are the key informant's perceptions of critical issues for women with respect to housing and homelessness?
- What are perceived advantages and challenges in creating a national shelter network?
- If this initiative proceeded, how could the network build capacity and share data and information to inform program development and policy discussions? How would the network reporting procedures look and how could this data collection be most beneficial?
- What would be the possible funding options?
- What would be the potential challenges (such as meeting the sometimes diverse interests of shelters for homeless shelters and VAW shelters) as well as the overlap that occurs in respect to homeless women in "battered women's shelters" and abused women in homeless shelters?

Two interview schedules were developed: one for transition house representatives and other Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that have national or provincial

expertise in issues of women and homelessness. The other interview guide was designed for provincial, territorial and federal government representatives that work with issues of abused women, homeless women, and the housing sector (see Appendix One and Two).

The research materials were submitted to and approved by the Ethics Review Boards of the University of Calgary. The Quebec research centre conducted all the necessary interviews in French and was responsible for translating the interview transcripts into English for analysis (estimated 8 to 10).

The data analysis of both the key informant interviews and the online survey was conducted by staff at RESOLVE Alberta. The analysis of the qualitative interviews followed accepted practices of social work qualitative research methods including identifying prominent themes and sub-themes (Tutty, Rothery & Grinnell, 1996). The results and draft conclusions were circulated to members of the Research Advisory team for their input.

The Feasibility Study Respondents

In total, 77 key informants participated in 73 interviews. However, because it was difficult to discern which individual was speaking in the dual interviews, we present the results as totaling 73. The breakdown of their backgrounds is highlighted in the next three tables. Table 1 is the breakdown by province.

Table 1: Respondents by Provincial Research Site

Province/Territory	Numbers Interviewed
BC	6
Alberta	8
Saskatchewan	6
Manitoba	6
Ontario (includes national organizations)	17
Quebec	9
New Brunswick	4
Nova Scotia	3
Prince Edward Island	3
Newfoundland	4
Yukon, North West territories, Nunavut	7
Total	73

Table 2 delineates respondents according to the sector in which they primarily work: the violence against women sector, the homelessness sector, or government. We interviewed fewer government representatives in provincial/territorial housing departments than we would have liked. In three provinces/territories, we were unable to find the appropriate representative. In five other provinces/territories, three government representatives declined to participate, and we received no response from two others. A contact in one province/territory commented that there was no governmental department responsible for homelessness.

Table 2: Respondents by Sector Research Site

Sector Respondents	Numbers Interviewed
Violence Against Women (VAW)	27
Homeless	17
Homeless & VAW	5
Provincial/Territorial Government VAW	14
Provincial/Territorial Government Housing	6
Provincial/Territorial Government Sector Not Specified	2
Federal Government Sector Not Specified	2
Total	73

Finally, Table 3 indicates the number of representatives were from diverse organizations with specific mandates or locations. The total of respondents listed by organization is larger than the total number of respondents, since the work of organizations could be applicable in more than one category.

Table 3: Respondents by Type of Organization

Respondents by Organization	Numbers Interviewed
Aboriginal Organizations	6
National Organizations	15
Provincial/Local Organizations	58
Total	79

In summary, we interviewed more key informants than originally proposed. The interviews lasted from about 45 minutes to three hours, again considerably longer than anticipated. The 77 key interview respondents represent the major stakeholders with respect to these two populations (women affected by homelessness and violence). We were successful in engaging all of the provincial transition house association directors and representatives from the National Housing Group for Women from most regions. Spokespersons responsible for services for violence against women for the provincial and territorial governments were also invited to respond and in every province at least one of these were interviewed.

The key respondents had impressive background knowledge with respect to at least one of the topics of homelessness or violence against women. They considered the proposed national network seriously and provided a wealth of perceptions, opinions, concerns and suggestions, many of which are presented in the following chapters.

Chapter Three: Housing and Homeless Shelters in Canada

This chapter outlines the key informants' views of the current situation regarding subsidized/social housing in Canada, as well as exploring the services offered to women in homeless shelters and second stage shelters for women who had been homeless. This chapter highlights the current services, strengths, limitations and data collection in homeless and second stage shelters.

Perceptions of Housing in Canada

Sixty-one key informants shared their views on the context of social housing in their provinces/territories (23 from the VAW sector, 15 from the homelessness sector, 5 from VAW & homelessness sector, 18 government representatives). The respondents represented all ten provinces and the three territories across Canada. They unanimously raised concerns about the current status quo. Not one respondent described the housing situation in their province as adequate; although four participants noted that the situation they were facing was not as severe as other parts of Canada.

In providing an overview of the social housing context in their home provinces/territories, the mildest comments from key informants described the housing situation in their provinces/territories as “challenging” or “significant.” Thirty-nine participants, representing all the provinces and territories in Canada, described the housing situation as “serious, huge, very serious,” and “a crisis.”

It's a crisis. Women cannot find housing. There is no housing.

Housing is a huge issue. We have so many people calling us for help and there is no place. No place. There is an extreme shortage of subsidized housing. There's such despair because there is no housing.

It's serious. Our slums aren't as bad as some poor third world countries. But we live in Canada and everybody should have the right to housing, water and food and health. We don't have that. For a country that says we do, we are lacking.

It is a very serious issue that I am hearing about more and more. There is a 1% vacancy rate for social housing in our province, and even then the units are not appropriate. So the issue is sometimes availability and sometimes with what is appropriate. It's a real struggle in terms of the mandates.

In describing the situation in their home provinces/territories, twenty-three respondents were concerned about the differences in availability of housing in urban as compared to rural areas.

Housing is a huge issue and it gets even bigger when you move outside of the cities and into the smaller communities. Very often there is not enough housing to go around. It's not as though anyone has a choice to say this is not a good living situation and they are going to find something else.

Housing is a huge issue; the lack of affordable, appropriate housing is huge. What housing that does exist tends to be in urban areas; in rural areas, there is little to no social housing. Women in rural areas have to stay with their abusive partner or go to urban areas to find housing.

The issue of housing is very serious. There are differences between rural and urban areas. In our rural areas, housing is a serious problem, but not at the magnitude in urban centres. Rural communities lack the services and resources of urban areas. Plus, homelessness in rural areas is different than in the city, it's more hidden. Homelessness isn't visible here like it is in [city], so people assume that it isn't a problem. One can't be homeless here and be anonymous the way you can in a city. We have a government making decisions about homelessness and rural communities are often left out. Provisions do need to be set up in cities, but not to the exclusion of other communities.

Seventeen respondents commented that, as much as they were concerned about the housing situation throughout their province/territory, Aboriginal people on reserves had even less access to safe, adequate housing.

Nationally, from an Aboriginal perspective it is very serious. First Nations have one of the worst housing conditions in Canada. You're dealing with overcrowding within the community so then you have migration to urban areas in addition to social breakdown. You have not only the shortage of housing stock on reserve, when you have migration to the urban areas and you lack employment/social skills--it's very prevalent, you see homelessness. In urban centres there is a lack of affordable housing.

There are significant problems in northern communities and on Aboriginal reserves, a real lack of housing among Inuit populations, real difficulty in housing. Very poor housing and very large numbers of people living in these houses. The housing is poor, both in numbers and in quality.

Reserve communities in [province/territory] are similar to reserve communities in other provinces. You have houses with 15-16 people living in them because there is not enough housing built or the housing being built is unsafe after a few years.

The reserves are overcrowded. There would be less urban homelessness if there was more decent housing on the reserves. We're lucky that it hasn't exploded. It's going to if we don't do something different.

One factor contributing to the context of housing in their province/territory was the lack of social housing. Thirty-eight of the 61 key informants (62%) specifically mentioned the lack of social housing stock as an issue.

There is not enough subsidized housing. There hasn't been any built for a while, and co-ops have not been built here for a while either.

Since the devolution of the federal responsibility for housing there hasn't been any new housing stock or new money invested in new options for housing. So it's pretty stagnant: no development with respect to new units. So people are left to their own devices to try and find affordable housing. It's very hard and I don't think we're the only ones; you hear about it across Canada. There isn't much private sector funding; it isn't a big money making business; they charge market rent and there are only so many subsidies.

We have a huge issue with lack of adequate, affordable housing. The small communities have serious overcrowding. This is all worsening as the federal

government has backed out of social housing. We don't have the fiscal resources to build enough to meet the latent demand.

With all the cutbacks to social housing over the years, the waiting lists have just grown and grown.

Without building new social/subsidized housing stock, the provincial/territorial housing authorities are placing people in the existing units. Thirteen respondents commented that the existing social housing in their provinces/territories were aging and/or in poor condition or even substandard. In addition, the existing housing was often in unsafe or even dangerous neighbourhoods.

We have third world conditions in subsidized housing. They are small little cottage houses, less than 1000 square feet, more like 800. They're not well made, and they're not well kept, so they have problems with rat infestation. There are stories of rats attacking residents.

It's serious. What breaks the heart of my staff, is women already in dangerous situations winding up having to live in the worst kind of places that puts them in a new set of dangers related to physical or mental health or violence. So women change community but haven't moved to solution. We know of women living in places that most people in our community would not allow their pets to live in.

In urban areas, affordable housing would tend to be in low rental areas which might suggest that the housing standard is significantly lower. So you're into virtually slum areas. It may not be a safe environment. Substandard housing is a greater problem in urban areas, but it also exists in the rural area.

While giving their overview of the housing situation in their home provinces/territories, twenty respondents noted that a variety of other issues intersect with housing.

There has to be a more equitable way of distributing housing resources. These bedroom neighbourhoods have houses that are a quarter million dollars. Then you come inside the hood and see the shacks where the poor are living. If there is any decency from Canadians, I hope they pressure the governments to look into the conditions, to stop picking on our kids. I'm convinced that's where it all starts.

The extent of the housing problem is one of the structuring factors of homelessness. The question of the social housing in my province is dramatic. There is little social housing and the prices of houses and apartments are rising. Even if there were an important vacancy rate, people in situation of great precariousness could never afford available apartments. Thus people are on the verge of homelessness because of lack of affordable housing. That is not the only factor that carries homelessness, but it sure is one of the solution elements.

I get calls from moms being abused, and the main issue stopping them from leaving is finding a place to live that they can afford. Property values are skyrocketing. The province is focusing on what they say are the most vulnerable, so even though we've got some social housing, a lot of people who are housed are afraid they are going to be kicked out because they are not vulnerable enough. I'm not sure if it is happening or not, but the fear is there.

With the lack of subsidized housing, women are forced to turn to the open market. Twelve key informants stated that if a woman is relying on social assistance, the rates paid for accommodation do not reflect the market prices.

The situation in [city] is absolutely desperate. I can't believe the change over the last decade. The cost of market rental has skyrocketed, and the income assistance rate for one woman and one child is \$520/month. There is no way a woman can get an apartment for that amount.

If you can't afford an apartment, which is quite common, people very often feel stuck.

Rent is very expensive and social assistance will only provide a maximum amount for rent. That doesn't give people much, so they end up in substandard housing.

Women are often looking for the most reasonably priced accommodation available and there are landlords who will take advantage of women's desperation to have a place to live.

In more rural communities that have seasonal tourism, ski-hill kind of tourism, we have hotels that will rent to people on income assistance in non-tourist season and then evict people during the ski or lake seasons.

Landlords discriminate against people on income assistance and single mothers.

Even when women are looking for the most reasonably priced accommodation that they can find, many women are forced to take money out of their "living allowance" to meet the rent. The respondents expressed concern regarding the dilemmas that this situation presents.

In [city], housing and homelessness are pretty serious. They don't want to create low income housing, and that's what we need. I'm not talking about just people on the street. Many homeless people are living in bad housing situations. Provincially, 29% of people live in poverty. That speaks volumes to me. They probably are not living in adequate housing, and probably paying a lot more than they should for that housing. They are likely supplementing their rent from grocery money or school supplies for their children. Homelessness is invisible in a lot of ways because we only focus on the "real" ones on the street instead of defining homeless in a much more broad sense.

A more in-depth examination of the intersection between housing and other issues that abused and homeless women face are detailed in Chapter Four: Critical Issues.

Homeless Shelters

Homeless shelters provide a crucial service by offering shelter to women with no or few resources. Some shelters have the capacity to provide bed space only, while others have the ability to help women reintegrate into the dominant community. In exploring the current context of housing and homelessness, key informants were asked about women's use of homeless shelters. Fifty-three key informants (17 VAW sector reps, 14 homelessness reps, 4 homelessness & VAW reps, and 18 government reps) described the services currently available and the challenges involved.

Homeless shelters provide varying levels of service, partly depending on philosophy and/or resources, as is clear from the following contrasting visions.

Our mission statement: to share the love of Jesus Christ, to meet human needs, and be a transforming influence in the communities of our world. We are a church, but also a social organization. From a social standpoint, we're still looking to achieve the three points from the mission statement. We provide a wide variety of services depending on the need in the individual communities. One of the goals is the chaplaincy piece. We're across the country in various communities, and respond to the needs.

We are closer to women's groups because we have a feminist analysis and vision. Since 1994, we have been providing immediate assistance to homeless women and women in difficulty. We offer shelter to women, and we address housing by offering means of getting off the streets. But, giving food and shelter is not enough. We also offer ongoing support to help them achieve lasting changes.

The majority of homeless shelters provide shelter to both men and women, although women are usually housed in a separate room or on a different floor from the men. Most homeless shelters provide short-term accommodation on a night-by-night basis. Shelters that provide accommodation specifically for women are much less common.

The conditions within the shelters vary; in some, women sleep on mats, in others, several women share a room.

We have a women's homeless shelter. They're doing the best that they can. Two women to a room; that can make it hard to feel safe. What if the woman next to you steals from you? We have the woman's mat program; women are sleeping head to head, 4 inches between each mat. I don't count that as first step housing.

The key informants identified questions and controversy with respect to the conditions bed space in which will be offered to women. For example, what about women who are active in their addictions? What about women with mental health issues?

A group in [small city] deals with people with addictions in part of the shelter. It was a highly controversial model within the shelter community but the recognition is that people with addictions are part of the community anyway and a safe place where people have some options is better than not having anything out there.

We have an emergency shelter providing overnight accommodation for someone homeless and active in an addiction.

One key informant commented that in their shelter:

We welcome women who are domestic violence victims; women who are going through a period of wandering and homelessness; women who have mental health problems or addictions; women who have a criminal past linked to prostitution. What these women have in common is the fact that they need help and shelter.

The programs offered to women in homeless shelters vary along a continuum from simply offering concrete services to offering more therapeutic services, including counselling. Most shelter services tend to concentrate on aiding a woman's ability to

meet her basic needs, focusing on providing women with a bed and are in fact, closed through the day.

A lot of homeless shelters strictly provide emergency shelter.

VAW shelters support women who are abused. But if a woman doesn't have shelter, she's put in a homeless shelter and there is no support. Homeless shelters are not always healthy places, people are often using and abusing. Without support, you either take that up or you fight the whole world by yourself. It's like you'll fail anyway, so you go back to the drugs—everybody else is doing it.

However, some homeless shelters do offer programs and services to their clients beyond beds.

There are outreach workers in some homeless shelters, but these vary shelter to shelter. The women may choose not to access available services. Mental health services are in some homeless shelters, but it isn't across the board. There isn't enough mental health support in the homeless shelters. If a woman is addicted, she'd most likely be referred to addiction services or treatment and she'd be encouraged to participate. Some homeless shelters have counselling on site, but that varies depending on the shelter's mandate. Not all homeless shelters have the mandate to go through that continuum. A lot of homeless shelters look down the road at "what can we do with these clients" because these clients should really be living in an alternate accommodation, but that ties back into the lack of affordable social housing. It really depends on the capacity of the shelter.

We run an emergency shelter for women who are homeless. All of them have experienced childhood traumas related to colonization and the intergenerational impact of residential schools as well as violence in adulthood. We have life skills and counselling programs, a prenatal program, family support program, culturally specific programs (for example, an Inuit sewing circle) and we have advocacy and legal support for women.

We are a multi-service centre that provides immediate assistance to homeless women and women in difficulty. We offer ongoing support to help them achieve lasting changes. Through an approach that focuses on respect for the individual, we support these women in their efforts to break free from their isolation. We offer women shelter and counselling through day centre and night shelter, hot meal service, clothing dispensary, physical and mental health follow-ups.

The key informants also raised concerns, problems and challenges within homeless shelters. For example, one housing representative questioned the wisdom of a policy within their local homeless shelter:

We have a homeless shelter. The women aren't allowed any money, so then they have to work the streets to get a dollar. That's stupid. That's not empowering anybody. You gave them a bed. But they have no income so they can move ahead.

Since many homeless shelters are designed to provide emergency shelter only, women cannot move ahead.

Since the stays are short, women have to “shop around” for a place to stay. They go from one resource to another and are constantly insecure. There are very few long-term resources for women. Places are available in mixed (for men and women) shelters, but very few women go to these resources. Some shelters are specifically for women but they have very little means, offering a hearty emergency alternative to the streets but having limits when it comes to hiring professional help to further the intervention.

Another issue of concern for the key respondents is that in some communities, shelter spaces for women who are homeless are simply not available.

In some communities there are no homeless shelters.

We have hardly any shelters for homeless people other than those who have a specific need, such as women experiencing abuse. There are a couple of emerging shelters for young men and youth.

One key informant commented that the lack/limited availability of homeless shelters may also be influenced by negative judgements made by people in the dominant culture. They may be unwilling to have homeless shelters for women in their neighbourhoods.

There is the “not in my backyard syndrome.” We don’t want transition houses on our streets or a community center helping homeless women in the neighbourhood.

However, the key informants also commented that communities are strategizing about how to deal with the lack of services for homeless women.

Due to the desperation and need, our community women’s centre is now operating 24 hours as an emergency shelter, even though it’s a women’s centre and not set up to do that.

Two key informants mentioned that the communities in which they lived were in the process of getting their first homeless shelters.

The [city] will open their first shelter for the homeless in March. We had to lobby for a designation that acknowledged the safety issues of women and vulnerable clients (mentally ill, differently abled).

In other communities, the local VAW shelters have opened their doors to women who are homeless.

In [city], we have a real dearth of resources for homeless women. There are 3 shelters for abused women, and none for homeless women, so the shelters are expanding their mandate to take in homeless women.

The VAW shelter mandate in [province/territory] is four tier: first, abused women with children; second, abused women; third, women in crisis; fourth, women in need. So in parts of [province/territory], women will come to shelter for the reason they initially give as homelessness. In the major cities that is very, very unlikely because they are full with abused women with kids.

Sometimes women who are homeless would be placed in a [VAW] transition house if they had room and there was no homeless shelter in her area.

It is problematic. We know there is a gap in the system around homelessness for women. If necessary, we would put up homeless women for a short period of time, usually one night. The challenge is for people with addictions and mental health issues. Our VAW shelter cannot accommodate these women.

If we have room we occasionally take women in and document it as a housing need. It's on a 24-48 hour basis. If they do not fit the mandate right now, often they have been abused in the past and they need a place to stay. We just don't have the room to do that.

Yet, in at least one province/territory, there is literally a cost to VAW shelters for taking in women who are outside of their mandate. As one provincial/territorial government funder commented:

Services for homeless women are not part of the program but I know our VAW shelters do take in women for a temporary length of time if they are homeless and try to deal with them on their own. They don't try to tell us that because we will cut funding for those days.

In communities where homeless shelters exist, women's access to them is often limited.

We actually only have one homeless women's shelter here and I think they can take in five or seven women.

There's a couple of shelters for homeless women, primarily in [large city] and it's not enough. The poster child for the homeless is often older men, but this is not the case.

There is one shelter where single women can go if they are homeless, but that is running over capacity all the time.

It would be nice to know how difficult it is for a woman who is "merely" homeless to get into a shelter. I've heard of women getting drunk so they can have a bed in detox because there is no where else to go.

Consistent with the literature, key informants stated that women are often reluctant to access homeless shelters because they do not feel safe in the offered temporary accommodation. Our respondents raised concerns about the ability of shelters housing homeless women to protect women's safety. Both the literature and our key informants mentioned that many women feel safer on the street with a partner than they do in a homeless shelter.

Women are often reluctant to access homeless shelters. If we are serious about doing something about women on the street, we have to do things differently. Women are staying with men who are unsafe and abusive, verbally/physically.

There are really no programs for homeless women. There is a 10-bed emergency shelter in [city] that is co-ed. Although three of the beds are reserved for women, many women do not want to go there for a wide variety of reasons. The number of women and children using that shelter are increasing, so you can imagine that women are pretty desperate.

Unfortunately, our key respondents gave no further details about their concerns regarding women's safety in homeless shelters or what they perceived shelters lacking with respect to protecting women's physical and/or emotional safety.

Finally, the key informants noted that across Canada women who have been accessing homeless shelters rarely have special access to social housing. In many provinces/territories, women simply join the general wait list. In other provinces/territories women may receive extra points for not having a place to live. In one province/territory, one social housing unit in ten is designated to go to youth, new comers or homeless people.

I don't think homeless women get special access; there are no government policies to give that group special attention. They aren't treated any differently than anyone who is looking for an apartment. They get the same amount of money. If they get any special attention, it would be because they've been able to get into a homeless shelter and staff lobby or advocate on their behalf to make sure they get what is available out there. Sometimes when you're trying to do it on your own, you don't know what is available.

Homeless people don't have as much access. They do get points for not having anywhere to live, but they don't get special priority. They may well have to try and find something that isn't social housing and be on a waiting list for years.

In [province/territory], one subsidized unit in ten is designated to homeless youth (16 or 17 year olds), new arrivals or homeless people. The reason this was set up is if you go strictly in chronological order, these groups may never get housing. From the work I do, I'd say that there still has to be more thought and funding put into place to assist people who are homeless.

No, there is no special access for homeless women as a group. When you're trying to apply for social housing, which is administered by the municipalities, they do manage their lists based on needs, but it doesn't mean you're going to get in there much faster. The special priority for abused women was for a very good reason, like homicidal ex-partners. What has happened is that every special priority that gets housed, pushes other people down the list. If someone is on the list that is low income or homeless, they could actually move farther down the list because of the priority given to abused women. The provincial government is looking at putting forward some regulation changes to the special priority policies to address some of these concerns.

Some homeless shelters are funded by provincial governments. However, for those associated with churches, the funding may be through donations.

We receive funding mostly from donations as a non-profit organization. We do receive some private donations, and funding from all levels of government, again depending on the community and the programming.

Homelessness initiatives don't have a program owner. It's an operational responsibility for us [provincial/territorial government]. Over time we've had a number of shelters develop, and we work with each individual operator on what service they provide. We do fund the homeless shelter—varying from operational

grants, to per diems. We've created a network of emergency shelter providers to ensure we are meeting client's needs.

In [province/territory], the municipalities are actually the service system managers for homeless programs. They're the ones who contract with service providers to provide services to homeless individuals. We [provincial/territorial government] provide funding to the municipalities to meet the needs of the local communities.

Homeless women's shelters are funded on a per diem basis.

Homeless shelters are dependent on fee for service from us [provincial/territorial government] and then private donations.

Homeless shelters across Canada seem to consistently struggle with under-funding.

Our homeless women's shelter is unsafe and overcrowded, primarily because of little funding and a great need.

The municipality is responsible for issues around homelessness. The funding is based on a per diem and the municipality sets the per diem level. Some of our shelters are going into deficit trying to provide homeless shelter for women because the per diem levels are so low they cannot make ends meet. We try to advocate with the municipality, and bring awareness to the community, but if the municipality doesn't see it as a priority, then an organization really has to decide whether they can afford to keep running the program.

If shelters were fully funded, all beds would be open and all staff positions filled and paid well enough that you wouldn't have issues of staff retention. People working in the homeless shelters are going to the food bank because they don't make enough money. We ask people to make life and death decisions, and pay them little. Let's take care of that first. If you really want to address issues, then homeless shelters can't turn people away. There must be room for everybody.

Key respondents also connected the lack of support services, programs and counselling to under funding.

Women tell us that they are often left to themselves, and for all kinds of reasons. I don't think that it's deliberate from those resources, but mostly for structural reasons, like lack of personnel, lack of material or financial resources, it seems more difficult to have this follow-up intervention in the community.

Maybe you could challenge government people to spend a whole day and night in a shelter to see what that means. They wouldn't do it. But would they change how they were willing to fund services and supports if they had to live it? I think they would change things if it meant they had to sleep on a mat. Then officials also make judgements. They say "they choose to be homeless." Give me a break.

Second Stage Housing for Women who have been Homeless

Across Canada, there are few second stage homes for women who are homeless. Most of our key informants had no information on second stage shelters for women who

had been homeless, however seventeen key informants (2 VAW sector, 6 homeless sector, 4 homeless and VAW sector, 5 government reps) were able to respond to our question about second stage housing for women who have been homeless.

Second stage shelters for women who have been homeless provide a transitional step between staying in homeless shelters and living independently. Second stage housing provides a foundation and supportive environment from which women can rebuild their lives and reintegrate with the dominant community. Our key informants stated that the option of second stage housing provides a vital service for women.

Transition housing (second stage) gives women much needed time because the process to reintegrate into society is very hard and tedious.

Intermediate, transitional or second step resources allow women with housing, addictions and mental health issues to stay longer and get back on their feet.

Transition housing is one of the tracks which is explored for the women who have lived long periods on the streets. This solution was a proposition of some of our network members to meet particular needs, mostly with regard to the young single-parent mothers. We opened a long period shelter service that offers women accompaniment and reintegration. This initiative makes it possible for the women to rebuild themselves, to take a breath and to recreate a network, to feel self-confident again and to regain some power over their own life. But, at the end of this period, if society does not offer a bridge to have access to long term affordable and safe housing, it is likely that there will be resource "clogging."

Second stage housing for single women tends to be designed as communal living in which women have their own room but share common living areas. For women with children, self-contained units are a more typical design. Only five key informants commented on the allowed lengths of stay in second stage shelters for homeless women. Their reports seem to indicate a broad variation, ranging from three months to two years to no time limit at all. The services and programs offered in specific second stage shelters for women who had been homeless also varied widely.

We do have a transitional housing program with four units where women and families can be admitted if they are homeless. Those are three month units and are always full.

Our program is designed for women experiencing a difficult period in their lives, who wish to participate in a program of social reintegration. It's not a front line shelter service. We welcome women for up to 18 months. This program offers community living in a secure environment at an affordable cost. A professional team of residence counsellors accompanies each participant as she follows a personalized program adapted to her specific needs and goals. Individual and group support is provided to reinforce the strengths and abilities of each woman. Women have to agree and contribute with their social worker on an action plan that aims community reinsertion. We help stabilize their situation, recreating a social and services network. We then assist them to find social housing when available or at least an affordable apartment, because we know that women become quickly disorganized when they don't have sustained support. Since they

can stay here with us for a longer period, they participate in community life; they resume contact with their health and social professionals, either their doctor or social worker or psychiatrist; and they have to do volunteer work at least ten hours a week. We choose to work with their capacities and competence instead of focusing on their problems.

Some homeless shelters provide not only emergency beds for a place to sleep overnight, but also second stage programs for women.

[City] has created a catch-all homeless shelter and then created a second- stage response which includes everything from assisting people in getting rentals to a building that they manage themselves. They were tired of the endless cycle that people had to go through.

In our transitional residence, women often come in crisis, and then they stay. The focus is on independent living, so we function as a support to independent living. It's their home, it's their place. We try to ensure we are as non-invasive as possible. The majority of the women using this program have life barriers: mental health, poverty, abuse, and addictions. They can stay short term or long term—we have a couple women who have been here for years. We also have sub-programs that include housing within the residence: the day parole program, the teen program and intermittent sentencing program.

However, some second stage transitional housing is not gender specific.

There's a [homeless] shelter in [city] that has the emergency shelter, and if they do well, they can enter the program for alcohol and drug addiction. If they do well there they can move into transitional communal living situation, and if they do well there and get a job or training, they can move onto independent living. Not all homeless shelters have the mandate to go through that continuum. A lot of them strictly provide emergency shelter.

The consistent issue raised by these seventeen key informants is that the limited availability of second stage housing for women who have been homeless.

There have been some initiatives in [city] to provide women with transition housing when they get out of a first stay in domestic violence shelters or shelters for homeless women, but those are insufficient. So there are two different problems. A lack of affordable and accessible apartments as social housing, and insufficient transition housing units for women who are getting out of resources and need a transitional place to stay, allowing them to stabilize their situation.

We have little information regarding how second stage shelters for homeless women are funded. In one province/territory, Status of Women Canada has provided some funding for second stage housing. No other data was available from the responses to this research.

For those women who had been fortunate enough to access second stage housing, new issues can arise when women have reached the end of the program. Where will they now find housing? Some women may be fortunate enough to have the financial resources to access market housing. Depending on the length of the program, some women may have moved far enough up the wait list to access social housing. However, with the

increasing wait times across Canada, many women will not have this option open to them. Further, there is no special access to social housing for women leaving homeless second stage housing.

There is no particular policy that facilitates the access of homeless women to housing units after a stay in a shelter or a transition house.

One key informant commented on the dilemma women face:

We now estimate it takes \$3000 to rent an apartment in this city: first month/last month rent, you need utility hook-ups. How are women supposed to come up with money? I don't know where women go, I don't know. We have a low vacancy rate to begin with. SFI doesn't pay current rates for rent. It would be nice to track what actually does happen to women. Where do they go? Do they have room-mates? I don't know what happens.

The key informants also commented that some women have issues, such as serious mental health difficulties, that create almost insurmountable barriers to independent living. They suggested that for such women one alternative can be supported housing—long-term housing with supports.

Data Collection in Homeless Shelters

A question of interest for the current study is what data collection homeless shelters were doing. Twenty-seven key informants (11 homeless shelter representatives, 5 homeless & VAW representatives, 11 government representatives) discussed data collection in homeless shelters. This section reviews their perceptions of data collection, including the type of data collected, systems used, as well as the strengths and limitations to data collection.

The key informants commented that the types of data they collect are primarily determined by the requirements of their funders.

Data is collected to satisfy our financial backers and to publish our annual report.

What data is collected is really determined by the government you're dealing with and what they require.

Provincial/territorial government representatives for the housing sector commented on their reporting requirements for homeless shelters.

We require daily occupancy rates broken down by gender and age (adult or child, based on the provincial definition of adulthood as 19 or older).

What we capture are occupancy statistics: how many women they house in the shelter, their age, whether they are Aboriginal: very basic data. The homeless shelters collect a lot more data, but we don't require them to report on them.

At a global level, we keep track of occupancy for all the shelters on a monthly basis. It's been a bit of a struggle to get this but we're doing okay. We're also collecting information on client profiles.

The type of information collected seems to vary not only by province and territory but sometimes also by site. In some cases, homeless shelters were only collecting the information necessary to meet the requirements of their funders; in others they were attempting to gather a much more comprehensive picture of the women using their services.

We don't collect much data. I am interested in my client's source of income, and their current situation.

The data we collect is somewhat limited to numbers of services offered and to how many women came in. We don't want to collect more precise data about the women's mental health problems or the drugs they use or where they've been before. First, it takes a lot of time and energy and secondly, we want to address women's issues from a global point of view. Some women do have a substance abuse problem, but we see it as a survival means. As long as we can present qualitative information about the women we help, we are able to explain the difficulties women have and we don't need to document more.

We collect information on pretty much everything: the number of beds, number of people accessing meals, type of networking and training, community and family service type information, financial pieces for a budgeting standpoint, referrals made for housing, counselling, breakdown of gender and age for residential pieces, spiritual care. We try to gather a larger picture of the services we provide. Whatever the reporting structure, it must capture as big a picture as you can because the more data you can put in, in terms of the issues or the need for supports, the more able you are to get funding to provide direct response to client needs. If there's a need for addressing addictions, there are supports and resources available. So it's not just a matter of taking information and reporting it, but it is actually responsive to the needs in the community.

The key informants were asked if they collected data with respect to people who were turned away from homeless shelters. Some key informants noted that in their province/territory this term had no meaning, since no person would be turned away.

In our emergency (homeless) shelters, there is no cap on the numbers in the shelters. If you are homeless and need a place to sleep, you will not be turned away. If the shelter is full, you will be accommodated in a hotel if necessary.

We've confronted the issue of turn-aways. We have developed systems among the shelters where there would be little to no turn-away. We have opened a winter shelter each winter for the past three years. That shelter's job is to take the highest needs clients; people hard to serve elsewhere. We've two men's shelters and two women's shelters (homeless). We've asked them to work together so no one gets turned away. There may be incidents where someone is banned - usually the police are involved and they are accommodated elsewhere.

In other provinces and territories women can be turned away and some of those homeless shelters gathered data regarding the number of women they turned away.

Homeless shelters are asked, not required, to collect their turn-away data and the reason for that turn-away: the shelter is full, the person is incompatible with the

facility, for example, a male showing up at a woman's facility, or an active drug user showing up at a dry facility, or the facility cannot meet the needs of the individual (e.g. mobility issues).

The systems homeless shelters used to collect data also varied, from collecting the information by hand, to using computer programs designed for the needs of an individual organization, to using HIFIS, the Homelessness Individuals and Family Information System developed by the federal government's National Homeless Initiative.

We don't collect much data. None of the information we collect from clients goes into a data base (such as HIFIS). Our funders don't require it.

We collect our data "by hand". A while ago, the federal government contacted us to offer data collecting software and we've decided not to take it.

The information is collected in an MS Excel spreadsheet; we do not use any other data program.

We do have an information system that we developed similar to HIFIS. We have some sites using HIFIS. We're trying to coordinate HIFIS with our own management system. There are some sites that do use both systems.

The general/homeless shelters are using HIFIS provided by HRSDC (Human Resources and Social Development) in the north part of the province/territory, not in the south.

We collect data on all of our sites with the HIFIS software.

In general, access to the data was limited to the individual homeless shelter staff and the funders to whom they reported. If the shelter was using HIFIS data bases, the federal government also had access to the data. Aggregate data was reported more widely. As provincial/territorial government representatives stated:

The shelters have access to the information we collect, as does our department. We keep the data on a daily basis.

We do (the provincial government). The municipalities would have access to their own information, and they would also be able to see our provincial estimates.

The only people who have access to the data is our department. Of course the federal government has access to all the data from HIFIS data bases. The data we collect is for internal use to provide our occupancy statistics to community groups and to the municipality, but that is as broad as it would go. The only statistics we provide are the numbers of people in the shelter each night. We have a distribution so everyone working on winter emergency or involved in the shelters (homeless) know what the occupancy numbers are.

When asked how the data collection was working, only one key informant described it as helpful:

For us it is helpful, but we see it as information but not as something we have a strong investment in.

Nineteen key informants (8 homeless representatives, 3 homeless and VAW representatives, 8 government representatives) raised concerns about data collection.

We collect data, but we do not do much with it. We do look at trends, such as shelter utilization by residents of [another province/territory]. There is a concern about this because of the cost implication. 10-12% of referrals are coming from [another province/territory], and until now we have not been billing them. We are now looking at doing that. The challenge is that the government department wants to know the names of the women, which is a problem for confidentiality and safety reasons. We will not give it to them, but we are looking at having the women sign a release so we can send that information to [other province/territory].

Among the key respondents, was debate about the need for standardized data collection systems. Some informants were concerned that when a system is standardized, it is the funders who determine what data is collected provincially or nationally.

One problem I had with HIFIS was the big brother approach to dealing with homelessness. The original programming was, we want you to tell us who is in your shelters, not so much to support case management, or access to supports for our clients. The agenda was from a federal standpoint.

Others expressed concern about how such information would be used.

HIFIS gets talked about a lot at meetings. Service providers have mixed issues. There are concerns about what the information is being collected for. No one wants to see the information and statistics collected used against people.

My concern about something like HIFIS is: what is its purpose? When will the data collection stop? How will the data be used? I don't want to see something just give out numbers.

Some groups send their data automatically to the governments and that's quite worrying from our point of view. We fear the loss of confidentiality, control measures, even more so with the types of governments we have now.

Other key informants commented that standardization across the province or territory was important.

When you have that many streams of data collection, integrity of the data is questioned.

Not all of the shelters are on the same data program, and that is a concern. We will be developing a standardized system to use across the province, which will be HIFIS compatible but not HIFIS dependent. When we started it was up in the air as to whether HIFIS would continue, so we could not build our program on something that had an uncertain future.

There is other data we will be collecting after we develop the performance measures, once we complete the standardization process. We'll be able to get a truer count of the numbers of people served—a better analysis of the people who go into our domiciliary programs. Mental health is an emerging need and research is being carried out on mental health issues. We are looking at who is in our (homeless) shelter spaces.

In consideration of the constraints on staff time and lack of funding to designate specific staff to data collection, the respondents noted that for the data collection program to be effective, the system must be user friendly and not onerous. Yet, there was also debate about what type of information should be collected. Some interviewees mentioned that only basic information should be entered with few fields that could be modified or used at the discretion of staff; while others believed it was important to have a more flexible system that could reflect the needs of the individual homeless shelter.

It's important that data collection support the day-to-day operations of shelters and be integrated into operations. It does not work if it becomes an extra task.

As with any data collection system, you can only work with what gets entered. It's only as good as it's used at the ministry unit level. We're trying to simplify things, in that the more fields you offer, the more opportunity for discretion. Data can then get lost, or not reported correctly.

We collect data on all of our sites with the HIFIS software. We find that this software is not complete enough; insufficient data is collected. That tool doesn't help us manage the information about our clients regarding their exit "off the street." We know how much persons are in, how many times they have been in; we don't know much more about them. That's not only the software's fault but also one of our big challenges to know about our clientele. If we want to help them get out of homelessness and we don't know them, it's very difficult to refer them to appropriate resources for employment and housing, or treatment. The data system helps us show that numbers are rising for our diverse clients but the complexity of their lived experiences is not captured by the software but more through the incidence reports. We don't have the staff to ask the right questions to better know our clients. That's our new orientation, to welcome the clientele and better help them find their way.

It needs to be responsive to individuals in the community who need access to supports. The reason people should come together is to increase their ability to respond to homelessness. Any way data or information sharing occurs, it needs to be for the person staying in the shelter.

HIFIS won't work in some of the larger shelters. At the [name of shelter], there's 1100 people. HIFIS can't accommodate those large numbers. The southern part of the province isn't using it. They've tried to get them to, but they aren't willing. The southern shelters tried an old version of HIFIS and there were a lot of problems. HIFIS has been expanding and improving, but the south says it's too late; they already built systems to meet their needs. A new shelter has been open since October in the northern part of the province and HIFIS is still not running there because there have been problems and no HIFIS support. The resources just haven't been committed to get the job done. Staff want to spend their time serving clients; they don't have time to work with a program. You have a high turn over of staff and then need to do more training. There is a lot involved.

Many of the key informants in the homeless sector saw value in using data more broadly. For example, they would like to have access to the aggregate data currently collected in their provinces or territories or would like additional data collected. They

could use this information to better understand if some of the issues faced by their clients are influenced by systemic barriers, what issues are emerging, and thus better address the needs of clients who are experiencing homelessness.

I'd like access to some of the information HIFIS collects. I'd like to know how many people from the surrounding counties are homeless. We don't have a homeless shelter in [town], how many people in homeless shelters in the surrounding area would identify [town] as their home community? What factors led to people being homeless? Did they get laid off and not have enough hours for EI, are they fleeing an abusive partner, or were there other factors? On the basis of that information, are there systemic issues that need to be addressed? If HIFIS could identify systemic barriers, we could use that information to better address the needs of people in the community.

For the occupancy rate it is working fine, but it is not adequate for tracking outcomes or trends in the homeless population. We're looking at what data we'd like to see collected, and it is leading more and more towards outcomes.

The data could be more broadly utilized to inform policy and programs. It would be an important tool for advocacy. There is a need for a diversity and gender analysis, in women's shelters. It would be good if the on-site experience of shelter workers could be used towards policy development. A lot of shelters are so busy, that they don't get into much political work. That's problematic, a weakness.

Several respondents would like to gather historical accounts from women to determine how many of them became homeless after fleeing an abusive partner. Are they experiencing homelessness because they cannot access safe and affordable housing? Are homeless because the VAW shelters were full? Are they facing other systemic barriers?

It would be interesting to know how many women leave the shelter for abused women and wind up at [homeless shelter]. I don't know if we serve the same women.

In areas where the VAW shelters have high occupancy rates, we see a lot of the abused women going to homeless shelters.

One respondent doubted that funders would take interest in their data since under funding is such an issue in the sector.

I'd like to see the data used more broadly. We've been doing this for 20 years - it could make a difference if someone would listen. No one wants to put money into operational funding. There was some with CMHC, but it would be hard now to open a new shelter. No one wants to fund programs; they want to fund research, needs assessments. It costs money to be able to pay staff appropriate salaries, for transportation, for child care, all traditional classic stuff.

Other respondents commented that, in addition to gathering information from individual homeless shelters, their municipality had also tried to gather data on the overall numbers of homeless people.

The city does a homeless count every two years. We have a grid; we take targeted areas where the homeless hang out if they aren't in shelters and teams of

volunteers and go out and physically count people. Then we call all the shelters, not just the one's that officially deal with people who are homeless, but every organization that deals with people who might be homeless (i.e. addiction treatment centres, hospital emergency shelters, youth shelters). We only count those people with no fixed address. We also do a bed count at VAW women's shelters; if the women didn't have this support they'd be homeless. We break out the data they give us by ethnicity, age, gender.

They do homeless counts and I don't think they're getting the women. Women don't think of themselves as homeless. One woman I know was sleeping on the couch of a man she had divorced ten years ago while she got her life together, but she did not describe herself as homeless. Too many women are at risk of homelessness and staying in bad situations. Younger women go to the bar and meet up with someone to go home with. These women are not on streets or in the shelters to be counted. The women that you see as homeless are only the tip of the iceberg and that visibility is increasing.

It's very difficult to count the number of homeless persons, as it is a mobile population. We looked at doing a provincial count, but one of the main difficulties is you have to define what homelessness is—this is not easy.

Chapter Four: Women and VAW Shelters

Shelters specific to violence against women provide a vital service in offering safety and refuge to women who are being abused by their partners. As mentioned in the literature review, 473 VAW shelters completed the 2003/2004 Transition Home survey.

Shelternet has a list of all the VAW shelters, second stage housing and safe home programs in the country so women can access them.

In this study, fifty-five key informants (25 VAW sector reps, 8 homeless sector reps, 3 VAW and homeless sector reps, and 19 government reps), representing all provinces and territories, discussed the VAW shelters and the services they offer. It is important to remember, though, that the various shelters provide different services, partly depending on their philosophy and/or the resources they have the funding to provide. For example, some VAW shelters can afford to provide group counselling and outreach while others cannot. Some shelters have cooks and cleaning staff; others rely on residents to do these chores, as part of the expectations of contributing to the household.

Our VAW shelter provides emergency shelter beds, second stage housing, and transitional outreach. We also staff the crisis line. Our actual mission is to provide programs and services to women who have been abused and their children. Our overall vision is to end woman abuse and its effects and impacts on families and communities.

We exist to address domestic violence. Whether a woman and her children require a safe haven from an immediate abusive situation or the woman is seeking to create change in her life, we exist to empower the woman, providing programs and resources that promote and facilitate growth, self esteem and understanding of the personal power to independently make choices. We offer safe haven, education, information and resources that women and their children require. A 24-hour, 7-days/week crisis line is available to all citizens of the region.

VAW shelters are designed for communal living. Typically, women with children share a room, single women share rooms, and then there are common spaces to the entire house (such as living areas, kitchen, dining areas) that are shared by all residents. Depending on the funding formula, in some provinces women with small families will share the same room.

We have a bed day rate based on the number of people staying as opposed to the number of rooms filled. So, if there is a room with five beds and only a woman and her child are staying there, that is considered two out of five, whereas in [another province/territory] they have a hotel occupancy rate and under their system that room would be considered full. In [province/territory], we tend to warehouse because that is the way the ministry set it up, putting women together, which is not always appropriate.

How long a woman can stay in a VAW shelter varies across the country. Most provincial/territorial governments set a time limit for how long they will fund a woman in a VAW shelter; and in some provinces/territories, this time limit determines how long a woman can stay in the VAW shelter. When women have reached that time limit, they must leave.

While the literature suggests that the average length of VAW shelter stay is three weeks, the responses from our key informants differed. They indicated that the length of women's stays ranged from three weeks to 2-3 months, with one month as the most common length of stay. Some key informants reported that in their province/territory women may stay in a VAW shelter for six months and in others up to a year. The time lengths indicated in this study may differ from the literature simply because we did not talk to all the VAW shelters across Canada. It is also possible that shelter stays are lengthening as access to safe and affordable housing becomes increasingly difficult for women.

Transition houses in our province provide up to 30 days accommodation for women, or more, depending on the pressures on the house.

The average shelter stay's length went from 4 to 6 weeks, to up to 2 or 3 months because women couldn't find affordable housing.

Women don't leave our VAW shelter unless they have safe, affordable housing—unless she's been a risk factor to the other residents. Women can be funded in a shelter for up to a year; we have global funding which means that we get money each year. If we have a chicken pox quarantine and we can't take anybody in and our numbers go down, we still get the same amount of funding. Women stay for a day or a year—it is still the same amount of funding.

Women stay an average of 4 weeks, which is very short, compared to some of the more urban shelters. The city used to pay a per diem per night; that means how long they'll pay for women, not how long they can stay. We're the ones who say how long they can stay. I went on a rampage with the city and told them that their workers couldn't tell our residents how long they can stay. "Our residents don't need to worry how long you'll pay either, that's our issue with you." We didn't want their workers inferring women could only stay 3 weeks. The city wasn't aware how much they were encroaching. Then we got provincial funding and grants and their funding takes into account what the per diem was. Then the province took over the entire VAW funding. It's important that VAW shelters differentiate between how long a woman is funded and how long they stay—and notice whether they are having a service delivery model that is no relationship to what people need but what somebody else wants to pay for. The underlying truth is that no one wants to live in a shelter more than three weeks but if you have to, you have to and you don't need to feel guilty about it.

What do women experience in shelters? For the first several days, women are often traumatized from the event that brought them to shelter. They may be very emotional or, in contrast, numb. They often need several days to settle in before they can consider making any decisions about their future.

Women often come with children; many of the children are young and are themselves feeling traumatized not only from being exposed to abuse but also by having had to leave their homes and routines. While some shelters have child care workers and child care spaces, these are not available full-time. For many children, being in a communal situation with other children is exciting, and the children may be active and

difficult to manage, especially if their mothers are preoccupied with dealing with their own crises.

Residents often need to take immediate action to secure social assistance and housing, since these two basic needs are central to re-establishing themselves. Sometimes women must start the process of getting social assistance and finding new accommodations before they have decided to separate from their partner, simply because these take time to put into place. If she was injured in the incident that led to shelter, she may have medical appointments; if the police charged her partner, she may have to make a statement to them about the events. If she is employed, she may need to continue working each day to ensure that she remains employed.

Some shelters offer group meetings either daily (or in the evenings) or weekly. Sometimes attendance is mandatory, but this becomes difficult with the many demands on women's time to make decisions about what she's going to do. If she decides to leave her partner, she must prepare a new home in the community.

There are usually counselling services in the transition houses or in the community that women access. There are outreach services for women who have left the houses so that they can access support after.

There are many programs and services available but it is a matter of finding the right person to guide a woman through the system. In our case, the transition workers (VAW) do an excellent job in doing this because they are familiar with the agencies in their communities. They work with social workers, mental health workers and so on and take that resident by the hand. In addition, our transition house run a weekly column in the local paper here; we constantly tell women that we have resource material, we have day services, we'll provide any counselling even if they don't want to come into the shelter, kind of like outreach, but they have to make that call.

If women wish to access the shelter programs or outreach services maintaining anonymity can be a challenge, particularly in smaller communities.

A shelter in [town] is set up to run parenting and different programs that are accessed through different entrances. We couldn't do that here because we're such a small community. Anyone who comes into the home has to sign a confidentiality agreement. We're very careful about allowing anyone into the home that might view a neighbour, or a neighbour might view them. But in [town] it's a different set-up, physically, so they run the transition home and other programs. It works well for them. People's vehicles are outside the building and they could be there for any program, so it's not a stigma.

Each province has different standards and funding structures, making comparisons across the country difficult. Examples of differences include that some provinces/territories provide the shelter buildings so the organization is not responsible for the building's up-keep. In other provinces/territories building up-keep is the responsibility of the shelter organization.

The National Homelessness Initiative has the shelter enhancement program. We [provincial/territorial government] administer it. We've been helping to upgrade both women and homeless shelters.

Most shelters are funded only for the in-house residential care they provide, not additional programs such as outreach or follow-up—although some governments provide funding for these. In general, the funding to pay salaries of shelter staff is minimal and staffing is at a “bare-bones” level. One consequence of this is that many shelters have only a single front line worker and most night shifts are single-staffed.

Among our respondents, off-reserve (or mainstream) shelters tended to receive the majority of their funding from their respective provincial/territorial governments. The respondents with whom we spoke stated that they received base funding that covered 70-100% of their operating costs.

Many shelters identified United Way, grants and fund-raising as the other funding sources they access to cover the operating shortfall and to fund additional programs.

Our funders are the provincial government and the United Way. The government funds 80%, United Way 8%, the rest are private donations.

The provincial government and the United Way are our major funders. We also get a little from the city and self-generate 15-20% of our budget from the community.

We receive a goodly chunk of change, probably about 80% for the emergency shelter piece from our provincial government. Now we are grant crazy. We apply for every grant in the free world. But we have a fairly healthy development program.

Shelters on-reserve receive funding from the federal government. Our key informants expressed grave concerns that across the country, on-reserve shelters receive less than half the funding that of non-Aboriginal Shelters.

Our major funder is Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. Funding is a huge issue. We get less than half the funding that non-Aboriginal shelters get from the province. We can't afford many staff. The crisis lines, outreach need more funding. We don't have enough services for children exposed to domestic violence. We can't afford to have two staff on after 5:00 until 8:30 the next morning so staff get burned out. When there are crises happening there's only one person to deal with them. It's overwhelming and it is dangerous. We try to provide the same services as non-Aboriginal shelters but we're burning out staff. There was an announcement for on reserve shelters that they had one time funding of \$6 million dollars but we have yet to see that money. That money has to be spent this fiscal year and we haven't got it. How are we supposed to spend it so fast? Then the government will say that we didn't spend it all so we don't need it. It's like we're set up for failure. It's not sustainable funding either.

The key informants also commented that, while VAW shelters play an important role in providing women with safety from their abusive partners, there are also limitations. One limitation is that in many provinces/territories VAW shelters are difficult for women to access in crisis.

In terms of transition houses, the ones in the city are always over-booked.

Women living in rural or remote communities also face barriers in accessing VAW shelters. Reaching a VAW shelter is a challenge for many women. The sector has responded in a variety of ways.

There is no where for them to go. Chances are they go back to the abuser or to extended family, if they can find any, because we can pay for that if they are within [province/territory]. If we can find extended family and the cost would be about the same as if we sent them to a shelter, we check with the extended family, and if they are in agreement we send them to extended family. Our travel policy says “to the nearest place of shelter” and that would be a shelter or a residence.

In some of our communities, we have safe homes under contract to us. A safe home will accept people from several days to a week. It is a local place provided by people that will take victims and children in. We use them if the battering or threats towards the women and/or children are considered minor, and if the victim has a history of going back to the home. If someone really wants to leave, it is difficult because the shelters in [province/territory] are far apart. Most people would have to fly from their communities to go to a shelter, at great expense, but the government does pay for it because it is within our program.

Another issue is in smaller communities, people all know each other so even if women can reach a safe house or a shelter, maintaining anonymity is a challenge.

Our shelter is very small. It’s a small, tight-knit community and so it’s difficult for women to go to the transition home there. Safety is an issue; its makeshift accommodations and its not like you can flee in [city].

Another limitation raised by two key respondents is related to the concept of a shelter—they are meant to be a temporary refuge in a crisis.

Shelters are temporary safety. That’s what they are meant to do; but is there a way to put forward a greater role in terms of empowerment for women? Moving beyond the immediate need, to escape abuse for 30 days.

I’m not opposed to shelters but they are very limited and haven’t expanded enough to look at resources beyond their organizations. I think they have to change their mandates, get away from telling people about housing. Instead, they need to start being a crisis place to provide women a safe place to be for a short period of time, and the how can they accommodate her when she goes back into her home and goes back into her violent relationship. They do serve a purpose, but they are only serving 2% of the population. Women are in abusive relationships but they aren’t leaving and don’t want to use shelters because they feel that they are bombarded and have no control when they are in them. But we need to have safe places when women are in that moment of crisis. Many of the rules around addictions and mental health would have to change.

A final issue raised by forty-eight key respondents was in regard to the special priority given to women leaving VAW shelters. Women are only in VAW shelters for a limited time, and if they make the decision to leave their abusive partner, they need a new

place to live. In recognition of the safety needs of women leaving VAW shelters, most shelters/territories will give women special priority to social housing.

If they have been victims of domestic abuse or sexual aggression, they usually have access to an apartment a bit more rapidly.

Women apply for subsidized housing through the Housing Division. Because they are fleeing an abusive partner, they would score higher on the application form. It's a points based system and worse cases are seen first. They would be seen as a priority compared to other applicants because their points would be higher.

We have a priority housing protocol with [province/territorial] Housing. The wait list is on a point system; the maximum number of points is 99, but a woman who is leaving an abusive situation is given 100 points and put at the top of the list.

However, respondents stated that the specific policy varies according to which province or territory a woman resides, and in some cases is dependent on the specific municipality.

Each municipality puts together their own policy and criteria. Some municipalities give priority to women fleeing abusive relationships; others have different criteria more income testing based on a lot of other factors than if you have children and some of those kinds of things. It just depends on how they are defining need in their priorities for making decisions. It is up to each municipality to decide how they will use those dollars.

There are special policies but they vary according to the municipality. Some housing authorities leave a certain number of units available for women. But in other municipalities, if you weren't a resident of that municipality (such as a woman who has to leave her hometown because her abusive partner is particularly dangerous, or a woman whose hometown doesn't have a shelter), you can't get into the housing. Because you've been in an emergency women's shelter you aren't eligible. So there are all sorts of issues.

As mentioned above, not all communities grant women who have been in VAW shelters special priority or access to social housing.

We have been asking this question a lot, especially in the [city] area, around developing an interagency protocol. Our local housing authority would help with that. Right now, being a victim of abuse gives you more points in the system but it doesn't necessarily put you near the top of the list. There are no formal policies to address their needs. There does tend to be some advocacy that happens on a case by case basis, if women can connect with supports. It is not a formal system by far, and it completely depends on their history with the housing authority.

There is no formal policy, which is a concern that we are addressing. If we have a referral from the shelter (VAW) for a woman with children, we would try to help them. For example, we've paid damage deposits or other costs because income support could not react quickly enough. There is no formal policy in place; it is done on a case by case basis.

At various time in the past, abused women have had preferential treatment. Our housing authority used to give priority to women leaving shelter, but they're not continuing with this policy. Unofficially, most of the housing units will, if they can, place our families higher on the list. Sometimes they can, sometimes they can't.

In addition, the key informants raised concerns about the policies that some communities have established in order for women to be recognized as abused and therefore qualified to receive priority status to social housing.

Women can only get special priority if she's been abused in a certain time limit. So if a woman is homeless because of abuse and she doesn't apply in time, she can't get the priority.

A third party has to confirm the person is a victim (victim service workers, social workers, E.D. of transition home) along with other criteria in place.

Women have to prove that they lived with their abusive partner to get special priority housing where they are bumped up the list in terms of affordable housing. We've just been able to implement a program with the city where if women can't prove habitation, but they've been stalked for more than six months they can get a rent supplement unit. It's the same as affordable housing, but they aren't part of the special priority program. Women are stuck, if they can't prove they've lived together, or if you've moved apart and he's stalking you, you're still at risk. A lot of women don't get special priority. This is part of the problem.

There are fairly rigid criteria around what an abused woman looks like. In our area, in order for her to jump the five year queue she has to have been living with her abuser within the last three months. If not, she can't priority status, she only gets "urgent" status. She can wait up to two or three years for housing. If a woman is being stalked and she left him more than three months ago, she doesn't get priority status. What an absurd notion. These criteria are a way to control who is where. It's also social denial.

Even if women have been assigned special priority for social housing, the key informants noted, that with the current situation for housing, many women cannot gain access.

The housing authorities in the larger population centres usually give priority status to women leaving a family violence shelter. However, many women are forced to return to a partner because of lack of housing or income support.

Women leaving abusive situations are given priority to get into subsidized housing. But if they're not available, they're not available, so it doesn't matter how much priority you have. However, there is an effort to give women that kind of attention and priority.

It's really tough. There's been a recent protocol, where our housing department has agreed to prioritize abused women in bumping them up the list for subsidized housing. But it's still tough; it's probably the greatest impediment for women leaving abusive relationships. There's not enough spaces in subsidized housing.

There is special priority status for women leaving VAW shelters in [province/territory]. They go to the top of the waiting list. This is a very important policy. The issue for us is the need to do more than that. What can be done while women are waiting for subsidized housing? Here there is a 2 ½ year wait for subsidized housing if someone is working from the bottom of the list to the top. If three women with children are leaving a shelter they go to the top of the list, and wait for their turn according to the date they applied. They do get the next three available units; but you can't predict when those units will become available. It is important to have transitional housing, or the ability to provide affordable housing in the private sector while women are waiting for subsidized housing. And of course that isn't the case.

Women who do get priority have to wait an average of two months in my community. But it depends on whether you are a single person; whether you have a family; how large your family is. There are a whole lot of different variables. Housing for single women is very limited.

If women do get subsidized housing, it is often substandard quality and/or in unsafe neighbourhoods.

Even though priority housing is in place, the housing that is available is inappropriate. Single moms with children are being put into areas where their children are at high risk of becoming involved in gangs and drugs, but they have no choice because that is all there is. Many of the houses not kept up, are overrun with vermin, and women are expected to live in that! She is only allowed to refuse 3 places, and then she is dropped from the list. With only a 30-day stay in shelter a woman does not have a lot of choices about what they can refuse. Even though the data may say that we don't have a long wait, it's not appropriate housing.

Second Stage VAW Shelters

Fifty-two key informants (24 VAW sector reps, 7 homeless sector reps, 3 homeless and VAW sector reps, 18 government reps) spoke with us about VAW second stage shelters. Second stage shelters provide women who are leaving their abusive partners with a transitional step between the short-term measures of a VAW shelter and living independently. Generally, in second stage shelters, women live with their children in their own apartment; but the units have enhanced security measures in place to address the families' safety needs as well as programs, services and/or supports. Only women who have been in VAW shelters can access second stage. Allowed lengths of stay in second stage shelters vary across the country but range from six months to eighteen months, with a year being the most common option. Most key informants did not give many details about the second stage housing, however two VAW shelter representatives commented:

We have second-stage housing, five apartments. Women can apply to stay in them for up to six months. It often depends on their safety. Obviously there is more security and safety in our home and depending on where they are at and how much support they need often determines their choices.

Second-stage residential housing is the best kept secret in [province/territory]. You would think, with the number of women who go through shelters that we would have long waiting lists, but we don't. That's beginning to change, but it's only been three years since second-stage housing really got off the ground here. I always felt that people who were repeat users of shelters should be in a longer-term residential program such as this. We are also given public housing units as interim units for rural areas that can be used at the shelter's discretion. The person who resides there has a normal landlord-tenant relationship with the Housing Authority, but the shelter determines who goes in there.

Across Canada, access to VAW second stage housing appears to be very limited for women and children. Our key informants consistently noted that in their province/territory there was little in the way of second stage housing. While we did not specifically ask key informants for accurate counts on the number of VAW second stage shelters in their home province/territory, the number of second stage shelters varied from none to a maximum fourteen. However, data from two provinces is missing. Of those reporting, most provinces/territories seemed to have three or four VAW second stage shelters.

As mentioned, key informants in three provinces/territories reported that they have no VAW second stage shelters.

We don't have second stage housing anymore. It was axed by the Conservative provincial government. We have one (VAW) shelter that women can stay for two years. But you're in one room with your kids. It's tough on women; one room with your kids.

We don't have second stage housing here. But there is no maximum length of stay in the women's shelters (VAW). It is considered temporary placement so we let them stay if we think they are making sufficient progress. We wouldn't care how long they stayed providing it's not over six months.

The lack of availability of second stage housing on reserves is also a concern.

We've wanted second stage housing for years, but it's just too big a ticket item.

We can only keep women for 21 days. But we get women who are so traumatized and in such unsafe situations, after 21 days they don't want to leave. They're afraid. They don't have a home to go to. In 21 days you're just starting to make plans. If we had second stage housing, women could have six months or a year to get their plans together before they have to move on.

In those provinces/territories that do offer VAW second stage shelters, key informants related concerns about the limited availability.

We need more second-stage housing across the country.

Second stage housing is not available in [province/territory]. The literature tells us that for every emergency bed there should be two to three second stage beds. And I think we are about 600 apartments short in [province territory]. And that is just to serve women leaving emergency VAW shelters.

Second stage housing is minimally available and mostly available in [city]. There are 4-5 across the province and have waiting lists of 3 months. In emergency shelters, the maximum stay is 30 days. We have to apply for special permission to have them stay, and then you only get a maximum of 10 day extensions.

The 3 second stage houses are all in the urban areas. The second stage houses just don't work for rural women. Sometimes they'll take women from the surrounding area if they have a vacancy. But one of them only has 5 units and women can stay for a year, so they're usually full. There just isn't a lot of option.

After abused women have completed their residency in second stage transitional housing, the next step is to live independently. One province offers women who are leaving second stage priority status behind abused women in VAW shelters but before the general wait list for social/subsidized housing.

The opportunity to get social housing after second stage housing is difficult. There is a policy with [housing authority] that allows women in transition houses to be given top priority for housing, and the next priority is women leaving second stage housing.

In the other provinces and territories, women are simply placed on the general wait list.

We advocate for them with the Housing Authority to assist them in getting housing throughout the community.

One of the contributing factors to the lack of availability may be related to funding.

The funding of second stage houses, with more support and longer terms of stay, are important. It's a continuum but this part is insufficient at this point.

It's not a core program of anybody's. It isn't like you can look to a single place and say "here's what it is." They are an interesting bunch to try and capture.

In three provinces and territories, provincial governments do provide some funding: the housing department funds the actual structure, while the VAW departments fund programming.

We (VAW provincial government department) fund some of the staffing, but not any of the infrastructure kinds of things. They get funding from a number of sources and they are started to stray more towards the housing arena. Some of the funding they get is from some of the other departments not us. It's not really housing that we are involved with—we do the programming stuff.

Also from the housing department we fund the operating loss on some of the second stage housing - on the actual building.

Second stage housing in the other provinces/territories does not have government support or only minimal support.

There is no provincial funding for second stage housing.

Some of our VAW shelters have put up transition houses (second stage), but those are few. Transition houses mostly have become independent.

Our shelter operates a second stage unit which has three apartments, funded exclusively through rents: usually social assistance recipients. Some are self-paying. The Shelter Enhancement Program of CHMC did the original purchase and renovations so there is no mortgage. We paid for the upgrades, renovations and repairs. Normally it is self-sufficient, but in deficit years our fundraising has to supplement the overhead costs. Client services (counselling, individual and group) are provided by absorbing the clients into the shelter's follow-up program.

The key respondents noted that, if second stage housing was available, it tended to be in the more heavily populated areas of their province (usually in urban centres). To address this concern, one provincial government began an initiative for rural and northern areas by establishing "interim housing." It has had mixed success.

The Housing Authority provides units that are rented to the VAW shelters and subleased to clients. However, the shelters receive no money for the costs of repairs, lawn maintenance, furnishings, cleaning, or repairs, making them a drain on the resources of some shelters.

A provincial government representative commented:

The shelters started to give up their interim housing because it was costing them too much (e.g. had to furnish it, maintain it). We took those concerns to Housing but they were not responded to in a timely way.

Data Collection in VAW Shelters

One question of interest for the feasibility study was what data shelters currently collect with respect to their clients. Forty-seven key informants (29 VAW representatives, 5 VAW and homeless shelter representatives, and 13 government representatives) related how data is collected in their region/province/territory, who can access the data, what data collection systems they use (particularly computer programs), as well as any strengths and concerns with respect to data collection. A specific concern is related to the issue of "turn-aways" in the VAW sector. Finally, the stakeholders discussed other concerns and gaps with the data collection process and how some of these could be addressed.

The key informants noted that the data they collect is primarily determined by the requirements of their funders. Provincial/territorial government representatives for the VAW sector commented:

Agencies are required to report as a part of their contract. The degree to which they can do that creates quality of statistics that we have, and most agencies are very compliant. It is to their benefit.

The information is quite extensive - it is a criterion for funding.

We ask shelters for abused women to collect utilization data. We require certain questions be collected on an exit survey, and we use (these) in government as our performance measure. It gives us some sense about the service they received. It

asks them if they are in a better position to keep themselves and their children safe as a result of being part of the women's shelter program.

The type of information collected varied not only by province and territory but sometimes by site. In some cases, VAW shelters collect only the information necessary to meet the requirements of their funders; in others they attempt to collect outcome information from clients as they leave the shelter. The information collected varied widely across the country making comparisons difficult.

We collect what the funders require.

We report monthly to [ministry] that funds the program. We report bed days for women and children. No names are passed on. Under our funding agreement, if a First Nations woman gives us her band number, we submit that on to [ministry], who in turn submit it to the Department of Indian Affairs for reimbursement because First Nations come under that funding. The only information sent to [ministry] is bed days and the First Nations band numbers.

We collect ages of clients, of mum, of children. We collect ethnicity. That's all we collect. We don't use a program for that. Our bed nights are put on a computer. But we don't collect social economic class or immigration status. It isn't a requirement of our funders. We have to do a Ministry satisfaction survey.

Up to this point, data collection has been fairly sporadic. We have a fairly intensive intake form that collects client profiles and collects information on what they are appearing for and what services they are accessing.

We keep the numbers of women, where they come from, types of abuse, history of childhood abuse, substance abuse, ages of children, contributing factors to admission, whether they are successful in getting subsidized housing, where they depart to. We also keep stats on numbers of calls coming in, outreach contacts.

We get general demographic information, a history of abuse; if they come with children, we get information on the children as well. We get medical information, referral sources. Most of it is done on intake, we add to it upon departure. Sometimes we find out more information as a woman stays a little longer, and what her plans upon departure are.

We collect a huge amount of data, just about anything that you can think of, dealing with the woman, her partner and her children. This includes demographics, literacy, income levels, history of violence, history of childhood abuse, pretty much anything you can think of.

While some provinces/territories collected information on homelessness at the VAW Shelters, others did not.

We don't collect info about homelessness, only information related to family violence is collected.

The systems used by the VAW shelters ranged from collecting the information by hand, to using computer programs specifically designed for the needs of an individual organization, to using provincially designed programs, to using HIFIS, the Homelessness

Individuals and Family Information System developed by the federal government's National Homeless Initiative.

Data collecting is done in each shelter, by hand.

We have collected data for the last 20 years. We developed our own statistic tool because we didn't want the government to impose one on us. Our members collect non-nominative data on women they shelter. We don't use software, those are taken by hand. It goes rather well even if not all our members collect the data in the same way. We realize that the more data we collect the less reliable it is, mostly about follow-up services. We don't have much social and economical data on follow-up services because those have been developed more recently and is more difficult to collect.

We had a paper based system for a long time. It was very time consuming and didn't work. We have developed a web-based data collection system called the Women's Shelter Information System (WSIS). With WSIS, each transition house inputs its data; they can pull their own reports but the information goes into a central place. It was an arduous process to develop, but is very useful for both the transition houses and for us. By and large we're satisfied with it, although it is a tremendous amount of work for the staff because they still have paper forms they fill out with the clients. It just isn't appropriate to fill out a form on a computer when a woman is in crisis. The transition houses see it as a win win for all of us.

We primarily use the HOMES data base.

We use Access.

We use VOICES, a Manitoba Association of Women's Shelters creation, custom designed for our needs as well as manual statistic capture.

We use an electronic Excel form that the transition houses send to us.

We've just started using HIFIS, before HIFIS, we collected information on paper and organized it as needed.

We actually have two series of data collection, one for our [provincial/territorial] funder and one for HIFIS. HIFIS reports are sent on a monthly basis to the HIFIS coordinator here in [province/territory]. He has trained each and every staff member in every house. They provide the computer. Sometimes women who are homeless would be placed in a transition house if the house had room and there was no homeless shelter in her area. That's why HIFIS thought abused women shelters should be hooked up in their system.

Some respondents who were not using computer data base systems could see advantages to moving to one.

If we had a system we could do our Danger Assessment on it, notes. We could generate reports from the information that is there.

A number of respondents that had used computer based programs to collect their data commented about them. One frustration that was commonly expressed by the

interviewees is that the programs were often designed according to the needs of the funders, which did not necessarily meet the needs of the VAW shelter.

The program is fine if you want demographics. They ask for our input, but in the end they design whatever they want. It is so quantitative. In one sense that's good, because we can point to numbers of families served and the funders, but beyond that they aren't asking questions that we want or looking at realistic outcomes.

Several VAW shelter respondents commented that it had been important for them to design their own system for data collection:

We looked at other jurisdictions and realized that data collection was frequently coming from the top-down: the funder would design a system and you would need to use it. We didn't want that to happen. We wanted to be in charge of our own data and its collection. We wanted a system that met the needs of the (VAW) shelters that would incorporate into it the needs of the funders, but we didn't want that to be the primary driver. At first we had to convince the shelters that once they start working with this system, they would be saving time and energy, but now they actually see the usefulness of data collection, so they can phone housing or social assistance and talk about the data coming out of referrals and the like.

Other respondents stated that they are beginning to use HIFIS to capture their data.

We are transitioning to HIFIS. We'll need to modify HIFIS to meet our needs: there are no areas that would address abusers. I'm just learning how to customize tables to meet that need. I could see a lot of adjustments with the data base. It's a question of learning how to do that. We log 40 calls a day, and the system doesn't take into account that work. The system is geared towards clients staying here, but we do a lot of information and support calls. A lot of staff like to write information down; they don't find much in the database system to write down details of what is going on for the client.

We have had a little difficulty with HIFIS because it shuts down a lot. We don't have a problem with the data required. It asks for different information than our funders want, and I would like it all to be incorporated, but HIFIS did say that if I sent them the information that they could modify the program for me.

Once the data is collected, the information is disseminated to various organizations. VAW shelter staff and funders commonly had access to the data. Some shelters also collect and routinely sent information to their provincial/territorial transition house associations. In addition, VAW shelters using the HIFIS data base sent information to the federal government.

In terms of access, we have confidentiality agreements. There's certain data that only the shelters have access to; certain data that goes to [provincial transition house association] and certain data that comes to us (provincial government). There is no public access to data, period. We safeguard that for some obvious reasons. We are really, really strict about that.

The only people that have access to this data is our ministry, including our regional offices.

People within our (government) department have access. We also have a provincial association that the department funds. They share the information amongst themselves. The data is part of the accountability framework.

With the HIFIS system, we have a data sharing protocol, and we provide ten areas of non-identifying information for the National Homelessness Initiative.

Because shelters are funded through public money, anyone who puts in a request can access a summary from the data that is compiled and given to (provincial/territorial government representative). When the shelter completes the initial form, a copy is given to me and to their local health authority.

All the shelters that report to the province are required to provide reports and as the provincial transition house association we have access to each individual shelter's data. We have a provincial data base so we are able to pull statistics and conduct research. For example, when a woman was killed, the RCMP asked us to be involved and we were able to look at the data from there. That area had the highest number of reports of non-response from police. The police said they would try to do better and asked us to monitor follow-up. We're just pulling the data on the results; if it's not better, we'll talk about why. The shelters are also collecting Danger Assessments. So we are looking at the level of lethality.

Eleven respondents (9 VAW representatives and 2 government representatives) commented on strengths of their data collection programs, particularly in the ability to perceive trends and influence policy regarding the needs of abused women.

It gives us a lot of information about why victims of domestic violence have housing issues and why they are using (VAW) shelter systems. It gives us a broad spectrum of who is using shelters in [province/territory].

I absolutely believe that on the local level, provincially and federally, this data will inform and influence policy, and identify trends and gaps in programs and services.

The data allows us to analyze trends, service reduction or increase, and it gives us detailed portraits of the women we help. We use those statistics to make demands and raise some issues for developing policies and programs for women. One of the advantages of sending information to our provincial transition house association is that we are able to draw a global picture and bring national attention on issues that would seem local to begin with.

We can see that women who ask for shelter are poorer, in low wage jobs or atypical jobs so, this is what we have to consider when we do representations. We know now that women ask for services sooner than before. This data is used to back up our demands and to better our services.

Thirty-four respondents (18 VAW representatives, 3 VAW and homeless representatives, 13 government representatives) raised concerns about their data collection. One of the ongoing data collection issues for VAW shelters is with respect to women who are turned away. In the VAW sector, women may call shelters that are unable to access them for a variety of reasons: in some regions shelters are not open on a

24 hour basis, in other cases women may be deemed inappropriate, or they may be turned away because the shelter is full.

One concern is how does one accurately track this information. What happens to a woman who is turned-away? If a woman is turned away by one shelter, is she able to access another? In addition, who gets defined as a “turn-away”? If a woman is deemed by the VAW shelter as inappropriate for their service, is she a turn-away? Respondents noted that even the concept of a “turn-away” is controversial.

We don't collect any information on "turn aways." The term is controversial; it refers to women a particular VAW shelter can't serve, but a lot of times those women are referred to another facility and are accommodated. Being reported as a turn away implies that they don't get served and that often isn't the case.

We don't have the concept. We have admitted clients (that fit the criteria for shelter service) vs. non-admitted (who have issues not specific to domestic violence but may need to be brought to the shelter anyway). Women who don't fit the mandate can still access the shelter on an emergency basis. Shelter workers can work with that woman within a 48 hour period to assess her needs and refer or advocate as needed. If the shelter is full, women can be transferred to outlying shelters. Women who are not admitted because of concerns that they would present a danger to clients are still connected with others who can help.

We never turn away abused women in [province/territory]. If someone is intoxicated, she may not meet the criteria. The shelter is located across the street from a hotel, so women are accommodated in the hotel if the shelter is full.

While some respondents identified that turn-aways should not be recorded for the purposes of data collection, others commented that it was important that data regarding turn-aways is tracked.

We know women are being turned away. I don't know how you can deal with that.

Across Canada, a number of women fall through the cracks, because they are not eligible to stay in a residence such as women with mental health problems, drug problems, disabilities. Mostly they're not able to enter the shelter because of the impact on the other women and children in the shelter. So they come and maybe are given some sort of referral, but they're not admitted. They may need extra care the shelter can't provide. We'd like information on what happens to them.

The data on how many women are being turned away would be useful in getting more funding and in changing policies.

We know that women don't get into a shelter or leave the shelter because other women are inappropriate and they feel triggered or at risk. We want to build on the data to understand "turn-aways". A government representative asked why we called these women "turn-aways." I asked her what she called women who do not get into our services because the shelter is not open or the agency feels they cannot safely serve them, and she said, "We don't call them anything." My reply was, "If you don't like the term turn-away, can you imagine how the woman feels?" If we're not capturing that 20% of the population that is being turned away because we don't have the capabilities to deal with, for example, mental

health, then where does that go if you are not taking it to other ministries? We should be doing intersectoral work and they want to pretend that it's not there because they cannot deal with it within the mandate of the ministry. We need to put a context to it. It's feeling like things are getting worse.

Currently, all (VAW) shelters are asked to report is the number of women who are refused shelter. It would be nice to have additional information, such as the reason for turn-away: she doesn't fit the mandate, whether it's homelessness vs. abuse. I'm not sure the shelters have the capacity to add that but it is something that we've been exploring with them.

One key informant commented that the HIFIS data base system is designed to capture the issue of women who are turned away.

There's a window on the data base that talks about turn-aways. Before, we weren't recording turn-aways. Now we'll be able to record the turn-aways and the reason i.e. mental health, addiction issues. It's going to address a lot of that.

In addition to being concerned about turn-aways, the respondents related a number of other concerns about the data. Many interviewees had questions about why they were being asked to collect certain information or how the data might be used.

We keep track of the number of women and children who go in and the length of time they stay in the shelter. We attempted, at the request of the Aboriginal community, to look at the numbers of Métis and treaty women and children accessing shelters, but that caused some problems. Not all the service providers wanted to collect that data, and some came back with statements like, "Why not collect on all the Polish women?" but no one had requested that and the Aboriginal community had wanted us to.

People still have concerns about where the data is going, who is using it and what type of barrier it might be to the women to be asked a lot of questions.

One provincial/territorial government representative mentioned that they were trying to address the multiple data collection needs of the various organizations:

We're taking a look at data collection with the [provincial transition house association] over the next few months. All members of the association aren't necessarily contracted by us (provincial/territorial government). It's not an apples and apples proposition when you look at the data we collect and the data that they collect. We want to look at who is in the best position and how can we tell the story of abused women in the way that can move that forward to get the quality services that they need. We do look at who does what. We have been working with [provincial transition house association] for at least three years with Canadian Outcome Research Institute (CORI). We've been using the [provincial/territorial] data base to put together a program that can collect all kinds of things: some information that we need, some that [provincial transition house association] does, and giving shelters flexibility to collect different data should they wish to. We are looking for public accountability for dollars, so what we ask for is data on what we fund. The other is really helpful in terms of service delivery and getting a sense of [province/territory] but in many respects that data

belongs to them not us. So it is a bit of a dance in terms of what we collect and what we don't and what the [provincial transition house association] collects and what shelters collect. Everybody has different needs for different purposes. The primary common denominator is that everybody cares about delivering quality services to abused women and abused women with children.

A concern related by some key informants was that the data collected by the province/territory is not available to the region or to agencies in aggregate form. Some respondents commented that this could also be a staffing issue; that there simply are not the personnel available on agency or governmental levels to analyze and use the data. Finally, in some provinces and territories key informants were concerned that the current procedures used to aggregate information collapsed it to the point that it was no longer very helpful.

The Ministry assures us that the data is being put together but no one ever gets it back from them for their region or agency, and we don't get it provincially to see trends. The ministry does not produce summaries or program reports. There are limits to building on that data.

The data collection program was not working because we did not have dedicated staff and a consistent, dedicated IT person who was there to deal with problems.

The problem is not so much data collection, but not paying a lot of attention to it. A lot of people have come and gone from our [provincial/territorial government] department. There hasn't been a consistent tracking of the information. The information is being sent to us, we haven't systematically reviewed it.

We have limited information and a limited picture of the experience for women. The data becomes so collapsed and collated that it becomes unrecognizable. It makes it difficult to use data to make changes or address things. You can't say that it is very meaningful that women are recognizing that they need to leave for their own sake because it cannot be demonstrated in statistics.

The key respondents were also asked whether there was other data that they would like to see collected. The gaps that they perceived in data collection reflected the types of information that the specific site was currently asking clients. For example, some informants suggested that it would be helpful if more detailed demographic information collected, such as ages of women and children, as well as their ethnicity. Others wanted more complex information collected.

I would like to see us do better data collection but I know that the staff are already working to capacity, so it would have to be a software program that is user friendly. Then we would have statistics. People often ask how many women access the home, but we can really only give bed days numbers or number of women per year. It would be nice to have more information, such as age.

We'd like to ask questions that we don't know as an agency, for example, the ethnicity of clients. There are increasing numbers of young women (17-19) who are probably the mandate of child welfare but are living in the grey area. We'd use the added information for program planning, policy development, and monitoring changes, so if the government has made a radical change in policy we

could track the impacts. There is a huge area of data that we do not collect because we don't want to be embarrassed about it. For example, we want to do a survey because not all our services can afford to be open 24/7.

We're probably not collecting enough. We're constantly having to make a case about the special needs that we're seeing in woman, but we don't have numbers. Starting this year, we're going to do a better job: collecting information connected to addiction, mental health, children in care, whether women are Aboriginal or immigrant, have disabilities. When the employment equity legislation got shot down in [province/territory] there was great nervousness about collecting any kind of racial data. So we haven't been doing it in an organized way.

HIFIS represents the opportunity to have clear, consistent information. Till now, the only data our funder has been interested in is average occupancy over time. This doesn't reflect the scope of the work we do. I'd like to see them collect contacts with women; information on the services we provide.

We collect so much information, I'm not sure what else we could collect. We don't automatically count calls related to housing. I imagine that the use of shelter and second stage shelters can contribute to understanding the problem.

A number of the respondents commented that it would be helpful to track the outcomes for women upon leaving VAW shelters and their experiences afterwards.

It would be nice to do more reporting on outcomes. Numbers only tell you so much, and because of confidentiality, we don't collect things like "how many times have you returned?" That's a dangerous question to ask in some ways because you don't want people to feel that they might be judged on that. But I'd really like to see more outcome related data: what is the experience of the women, what changed for them as a result of receiving services. That kind of information is way harder to collect, but the Canadian Outcomes Research Institute is helping us move toward outcome measurement rather than a numbers game. Numbers are important. You need to know that you are serving people but it is only a small part. I'd like to make sure we are getting good outcomes for the folks we are serving. It would have to be a balance between quantitative and qualitative data.

It would be nice to know the degree to which women are able to find more secure housing after they leave the shelter.

I don't think the length of time in first-stage transition houses is adequate, and I'm hoping that if they see how long women stay in second-stage transition houses that they will lengthen the first-stage limit.

I'd like to look at not only what is available to women moving out from their abusive partner, but how successful they are in moving forward, so a historical perspective as well.

It would be nice to track what actually does happen to women when they leave the shelter. Where do they go? Do they have room-mates? A lot of Aboriginal women, end up going back to the reserve. It feels safer there than in the city. They wind up in poor housing out on the reserve.

One respondent noted that while getting information on outcomes would be useful, in reality, it would probably be difficult to collect.

Recently, we started to move toward some outcome, but it's quite a struggle to capture outcomes in emergency service. Despite our best efforts, collecting outcome data is problematic. Outcome data presupposes that there is an end point, but accessing emergency shelter is episodic, so you can't look at rates of return as measure of success. It's difficult to measure incidents in community.

Several respondents mentioned that they would like to see information collected more broadly in order to inform work addressing violence against women.

A narrative from the shelter staff about emerging issues would be helpful. There's nothing on the forms now to capture that. It would be good to know about trends they are noticing on the front lines, this helps to inform us for policy decisions.

I would love to collect information from survivors. That takes time because you have to ensure that the people speaking to the survivors know what you are looking for and that survivors know they can have input into what's happening by participating in the data collection. I'd like to get the reaction of survivors on different pieces of legislation, like "they're thinking of passing a new divorce act. Do you think it would help you or not?" That's important information and we don't usually have the time or resources to get it; and the (VAW) shelters don't have the time or resources to collect that information either. Some politicians don't understand the connection between public advocacy, legislative reform and violence against women and why it is important to women. They see the immediate: women need bus tickets for transportation, but if you talk to abused women and say "they are thinking about changing the divorce act and making shared parenting mandatory and mediation," the women are concerned. I would love the women's voices to get to policy makers.

Some respondents were concerned about the notion of collecting more data. Notably, they questioned how data might be used, and, if more data was available, staffing must be in place to analyze and use that information.

My concern in collecting more stats is that it perpetuates that "poor women come to shelters." Is that good or bad? Poverty is a huge issue when they come in and a huge issue when they leave. It really depends on how people use the stats. It is the stats that show that women will go back because of the poverty they are facing; that's really effective. But if people see that it is only poor women - we are only funding poor women to come to shelters, what is that saying? Or women who don't have status?

There is other data that I would like collected but some is not appropriate. We would need to be pretty invasive with our requests, and I'm not sure that is in the best interests of the clients. We have to stay mindful of operational issues. What would be nice is if we had the opportunity to triangulate our data with police services and share information with government partners, but we are dealing with confidential information and so there are many barriers to overcome.

Provincial VAW Transition House Associations

The VAW transition house associations are provincial/territorial networks that provide a venue for VAW shelters, second stage shelters and in some cases community organizations focusing on violence against women to build capacity, share data, information to inform program development and policy discussions.

We're an umbrella organization representing all the women's shelters (VAW) in the province. We meet quarterly to address common concerns and set direction. We work with other partners. We assist shelters and we work with them to speak with a common voice. We do that through networking with shelter directors and members of shelter boards to provide them with needed support. We do public education that our members can use and apply in the local community. We focus on public awareness, education, working with on-reserve shelters, providing supports to the shelters, and support for the Board members.

We're the provincial shelter body. The goal is to serve as a coordinating body for all our members, to inform government around policy issues regarding violence against women. We also do research and public education.

We are the provincial voice for member organizations that work for the elimination of violence against women in [province/territory]. Member organizations are throughout [province/territory], all of them in the violence against women sector.

Our members meet four times a year, breaking the isolation of some of our members that are alone in their region. There are supported and connected with other resource networks. There's an important expertise trade.

The provincial/territorial VAW transition houses see supporting their members as a fundamental goal. The offered support means taking on a variety of roles. Some of what the VAW transition house associations provide includes support, training and capacity building.

We provide a forum for shelters in [province] to meet, share information and expertise, and support each other.

Networking is very effective because some of the shelters are very isolated. There is no other woman's shelter in town. So by bringing people together, they can identify common concerns and how to work with them.

Within each member's autonomy and difference, we support each of our houses in carrying out their own mission. Because resource workers are captured by direct intervention, we try to offer them some services such as developing tools for training workers or even directors

As mentioned, in conjunction with their goals, many VAW transition house associations undertake research projects that explore and address issues pertinent to their members. The research may be used to help the provincial/territorial VAW transition house associations inform policy decisions of their local governments.

We do some of the work that our members never have time to do when it comes to political representation. We attend negotiations with diverse ministries to

increase funding or to have the independence of the shelter and VAW community groups acknowledged so our members receive support as organizations.

The VAW transition house associations are also often involved in public education activities.

The second part of our mission is about prevention, public sensitization, rights protection and promotion of battered women's problems. We do sensitization to counter prejudices, placing women's difficulties within a violence and vulnerability context.

We also have a public education and sensitization mission on a provincial level supporting our members that do the same on the local level. We're the provincial government's partners for larger campaigns. We train our and other workers from outside our network that need specific training on domestic violence.

Another function of the VAW transition house associations is to network. With the context of housing across Canada, many of the VAW transition house representatives are actively networking with other agencies and organizations to address the housing needs of abused women.

As a provincial association, we work with other homelessness activists to work towards appropriate, safe and supportive housing for abused women. Our connection with housing is we believe that if there was safe supportive housing available for abused women moving through our system, then our shelters would not be so necessary - they would have appropriate options once they leave us.

We have also been creative in the housing options for women. In [province/territory] we've created a couple of partnerships. One is a research partnership with the Housing Authority that is looking at distinct barriers to women fleeing violence and why there is no opportunity to find another safe place. We have a priority placement within the Housing Authority. We've created in partnership with them, including a woman who is an officer that makes sure that women who are fleeing domestic violence are considered within all the programs that they offer. We do everything from rallies on the street with some of our sister agencies to high level advocacy for our services.

We meet with [provincial/territorial] Housing Authority and share issues involving our members.

Besides working with the housing and homeless sector, VAW transition house representatives work with other sectors for improving direct client services for abused women and their children, and also network to inform policy on local, provincial and national levels.

We assist shelters and work with them to speak with a common voice through networking with shelter directors and members of shelter boards to provide needed support. We meet quarterly to address common concerns and set direction. We work with other partners. For example, we have a memorandum of agreement with RCMP so that gives all the shelters a working agreement with their local detachments.

We're involved in a lot of partnerships. We work in coalition with other groups that are focusing on anti-violence against women work or are working on women's equality based issues. We also work with other provincial associations like the [Sexual Assault] association or the provincial Aboriginal women's association, or the Francophone women's association. We also work on provincial campaigns that impact abused women. We've been involved in campaigns that address poverty, or campaigns to try and stop the [provincial/territorial] government from clawing back women's child tax credit. We will work with anyone who has the best interests of women and children in mind. We are on every advisory committee that the government departments have. We do a lot of education within the system. When they're developing legislation or doing training, we're involved.

Some of the VAW transition house association representatives spoke of how effective working with the government can be.

The best policy and best directions come out of community/government collaboration. We've had some effective changes in justice legislation in [province/territory] as a result of that work, and are hoping we can have the same kinds of relationship with other ministries. We went to the Legislature around the Domestic Violence Intervention Act that was tabled. We worked on legislation, were involved in the development of the regulations, and became first province where transition houses workers could be agents in helping women to apply for Emergency Protection Orders. Out of that has come a really strong relationship with Justice. We've worked with Victim's Services; we're included in their domestic violence education, in the evaluation of the legislation, and we have an ongoing mutual goal. The Department of Justice sees community as an important tool to create buy-in in the community and have effective legislation that will actually change the lives of the women we're trying to serve.

We worked with government and they welcomed our input because community sat with government. It worked extremely well. In 2001 the provincial government developed a Better World for Women and we're now in the second mandate. We got 100% funding for transition houses. They are training transition staff, and establishing new standards because of pushing and pushing and pushing.

The existing VAW transition house associations are involved with the newly created Canadian Association of Women's Shelters.

If we ever impact domestic violence in Canada, we cannot do it province by province or shelter by shelter. It needs to be a federal priority and it has to be across the board. In Canada, each province has developed their own domestic violence programs, and some provinces are better than others. There has been no sharing, and there is a huge need to share best practices, even to the point of mandates. We certainly have not solved the issue of domestic violence, as it exists in every province, and this is not something that can be that limited.

It's a very productive group of women who have a common goal to network and to liaise with one another, to put women's issues on the table, and to look at ways to effect change with women's issues.

The objective is to become a formal coalition, exchange information on functioning, rules and regulations that govern us. VAW shelters are under provincial jurisdiction. We all want to be inspired by best practices. We have federal concerns through all the criminal law cases and some of the health regulation that covers some aspects of each provincial service. We are interested in putting our questions and our resources together so that victims of domestic violence become even better off. That network has no means; we work through conference calls and emailing.

Overall, the VAW transition house representatives describe the networks in which they have been involved as effective. However, as one key informant commented, “women are still being abused and so more work remains to be done”.

The networks we’ve been involved in have been very successful. But then a woman called the office, mad as hell, saying that she’s been reading about violence against women and what is being done? It was clear that she was also a survivor. But if she feels like no one gives a damn, other women probably feel that way and it’s important to also be visible so that the public knows that you are trying to do something and that there are people who care.

Historically there have been 12 provincial/territorial associations of VAW transition houses. At the time of writing, not all of these associations are operational. Two associations have closed their doors. Not surprisingly, one factor influencing the maintenance of a viable organization is related to funding.

The VAW transition associations have typically relied on a variety of sources to secure funding including federal and provincial funding, project grants, fundraising activities and donations. Two VAW associations also receive membership fees. Eight VAW transition house associations receive funding from government (provincial/territorial or federal); of those, six are receiving core funding.

We are lucky in that we have core funding from the ministry.

Four VAW transitional associations were accessing funding from the federal government through Status of Women Canada. However, the direction of Status of Women has changed.

We are activists and lobbyists. We were able to get funding from Status of Women Canada up to 2006 when the Harper government changed the rules: the wording in the women’s funding criteria and any group is an activist or lobbyist is excluded. You can’t lobby at any level of government, municipal, provincial or federal and receive money from Status of Canada. They were a major funder for a lot of women’s programs so it’s affected a lot of organizations.

We’re funded by Status of Women Canada, and now our funding is up in the air.

Thus, these VAW transitional associations no longer have funding stability. It has had a profound impact.

The VAW transition house associations that do not receive core funding face the dilemma of having to spend a fair amount of time finding possible funding sources, writing proposals to apply for the funding, which takes the association representatives

away from their primary work, yet in order to focus on their primary work they must have funding. Representatives facing this dilemma have expressed frustration that this is their reality.

One provincial/territorial VAW government representative stated that while their VAW association is doing vital work, her hands are tied in being able to offer funding since such financial assistance is not in the provincial/territorial VAW mandate.

Organizations that Work with both Abused and Homeless Women

As mentioned previously, we spoke with key informants from five organizations that worked with both women defined as homeless and women defined as abused. The services that these organizations offered ranged from those providing direct services to those who were primarily responsible for funding programs that work with women who are impacted by both issues.

Our goal is to respond to the diverse needs of women in our community. We have an array of programming that responds to those needs: a VAW shelter, a residence, supervised access program, programs for children who witness violence, a teen program, day care. The two major program areas are our shelter and our transitional residence. Our shelter serves abused women and their children. The transitional housing welcomes women in difficulty—women with life barriers, such as mental health, poverty, abuse, and addictions.

Our residence program is designed for women experiencing a difficult period in their lives. Women who have access to our housing services are women who have dealt with violence, alcoholism, substance abuse, prostitution. Women go through a reintegration process and those units are available for them to stay as long as they need. As long as these women don't have a stable and secure place to live, women are in and out of the different shelters and services which negatively influences their physical and mental health. Our philosophy is clear; we want to give these women housing security. We aim to provide stable, secure and accessible housing, as well as community support to women who have received the services of a shelter and are now ready to live a more autonomous life.

We work through partnerships to create strategies to address sexual exploitation. We address the demand side of prostitution through a community diversion program. We receive the monies that the men pay and we use those monies to help address some of the poverty related causes of prostitution, to help women heal from the trauma and violence through counselling and bursaries to help women go back to school. I use the word "woman" but there are transgendered and males; it's just that 95% of the individuals are women. We work directly with women through another community diversion program for prostituted individuals in conflict with the law. We try to help people rebuild their lives and remove or reduce the criminal sanctions. We also do public education primarily with adults, but sometimes with young people. We engage in public awareness campaigns and media work. Our work is mostly in collaboration. We don't replace other work that is being done in the community. We try to strengthen and support that work.

We promote social justice in the lives of young women (under 19) who are on the street and/or who are low income. We advocate for their rights with the children's ministry, youth prisons and sometimes schools. We do not provide services or shelter; we are creating a plan and hoping to push the federal and provincial governments to create some of the things we're asking for.

I am one of the Issue Strategists for [city] and I have the Aboriginal Portfolio. We're the point people for emergent issues, social issues. The issues affecting Aboriginal people never end. A lot of the work I do connects violence and homelessness. My group is unique within the homeless model here in [city], because we are funding homeless development since we have a separate pot of Aboriginal specific dollars to put towards planning and programs. We use those dollars to leverage either within the community or for specific organizations. An example of some of things we did to strengthen the spirit of the homelessness initiative, in other places, we started up an abusive men's treatment program. We're just about to launch the women's victim treatment component. We've done work with various shelters increase their capacity to serve Aboriginal women. We also do housing for Aboriginal people.

These respondents stated the importance of housing and associated programs being specifically designed for women rather than being mixed genders.

I don't think we want to develop housing on that traditional shelter for men model. Women's groups have always been very unwilling to that approach and we know that women don't go to these resources.

Similarities and Differences between VAW and Homeless Shelters

There are significant similarities but also important differences between VAW and homeless shelters. Both types of shelters provide crucial services to women. However, it is much more common that homeless shelters will offer aid to both men and women. Women-specific shelters are relatively rare in the homeless sector. Mixed gendered shelters tend to house women in separate rooms from the men or on different floors. While VAW shelters offer enhanced security for their clients (i.e. electronic doors, intercoms, bullet proof glass), such measures are not available in homeless shelters.

The types of services that VAW and homeless shelters offer ranges on a continuum from addressing concrete or basic needs to counselling and support. However, homeless shelters more commonly offer their clients only concrete aid such as bed space. Some homeless shelters provide only emergency shelter and may even lack the capacity to offer meals to their clientele. Indeed, many are closed during the day-time. As such, they are not in the position to meet all of their clients' basic needs.

With many homeless shelters having only the capacity to offer emergency residence, women experiencing homelessness are often in the difficult position of needing to search for shelter on a daily basis. VAW shelters offer greater capacity in this regard. The length of stay for women varies across the country, but at a minimum, offer a three week residence. A few VAW shelters in Canada will house women who have decided to leave their abusive partners until they have secured longer term housing.

Most VAW shelters are able to offer counselling and support services to their clients. Depending on the funding that VAW shelters receive, some can only offer such services to residential clients, while others have the ability to offer women outreach and/or follow-up services. Some VAW and homeless shelters offer specialized mental health services to their clients. The key informants representing women specific homeless shelters, or shelters that offered services to both homeless and abused women, often offer their clients therapeutic services. Mixed-gender homeless shelters are less often in a position to offer counselling/support services to their residents.

The guiding philosophy of shelters can potentially create overarching differences between the two. VAW shelters tend to be based on feminist principles, while most homeless shelters are not. A number of homeless shelters are operated by organizations based on spiritual or religious principles. Among those key informants with whom we spoke, only homeless shelters specific for women tended to be based on feminist principles.

One of the key factors influencing the types of services that shelters can offer their clients is funding. The funding structures between homeless and VAW shelters differ. Provincial and territorial governments tend to provide funding for the operation of VAW shelters. While some homeless shelters receive such funding, there is great variability across the country in this regard. Some homeless shelters receive operational grants, but more commonly receive per diems based on the number of people they house on any given night. In addition, some provinces have turned over the responsibility for housing the homeless to individual municipalities. Homeless shelters associated with churches or other religious organizations may primarily rely on donations from their faith group to fund them.

Under-funding is an issue with which both VAW and homeless shelters struggle. Fund-raising is a common activity among those working in both sectors. However, the key informants noted that their success may be influenced by public perceptions of their clients. While homeless and abused women often struggle with perceptions of others in the community and negative judgements about their situations, the key informants noted that community members tend to be more sympathetic towards women who are abused. Community members often place more negative judgements on homeless women, seeing them as individuals who have made a wide range of bad choices and are less deserving of help.

Data collected in VAW and homeless shelters is primarily determined by funding requirements. However, some shelters gather additional information to gain a more comprehensive picture of their clients; some also attempt to gather outcome data. Yet, in both sectors, the key informants commented that, while there was additional information that they would like to collect, they did not have the staff to gather or analyze the information. They also wanted to ensure that any information they collected from their clients would be used in aid of their clients and could benefit future clients. Both sectors were concerned that information could potentially be used to stereotype, discriminate or otherwise negatively judge their clients.

With the exception of the few shelters that offer services to both homeless and abused women, the sectors are relatively separate in their day-to-day functioning.

However, both mentioned that they may work with the same woman. At times VAW shelters will take in women whose presenting issue is homelessness. Some provinces have a broader mandate about who VAW shelters can house, allowing them to take in women in need if they have bed space. This is also more common in remote or rural areas. Other provinces are much more vigilant that the women must have been in a recently abusive relationship. But the decision to open the doors to homeless women can also be influenced by funding guidelines. Some provincial and territorial funders will cut funding for the length of time a “homeless” woman is in a VAW facility. It seems much more common that homeless shelters will house women who are abused.

Both VAW and homeless shelters are intended to be short-term resources for women. Second stage housing in both sectors is intended to provide women with a transitional step between the shelter and living independently. They offer some stability in housing and in meeting her basic needs, so that she has a foundation from which to rebuild her life and reintegrate into the dominant community. Some second stage housing for abused women offer enhanced security to protect families from dangerous or homicidal ex-partners. Some second stage shelters in both sectors offer programs, services and supports to aid the women’s attempts to rebuild their lives. Both second stage shelters struggle with no funding or under funding, and limited availability. There appears to be even fewer second stage housing opportunities for women who have been homeless.

For women leaving VAW or homeless shelters, access to social housing is an issue. However, most provinces or territories will offer priority access to women who have been abused in recognition of their safety needs. Yet there are also concerns related to the conditions under which women are recognized as abused. A woman may not have the necessary documentation to “prove” to the local housing authority that she has indeed fled from an abusive partner. Priority access is extremely rare for women who are homeless. Some key informants saw this as an issue of fairness; others stated that it is not a fairness issue but rather an issue of human safety. Leaving an abusive partner is when women and children’s safety are statistically at greatest risk, the time when women and children are more likely to be murdered.

Organizationally, VAW shelters have developed more formal networks both provincially and nationally. Although funding the provincial/territorial shelter associations and the new national Canadian Association of women’s shelters remains difficult to say the least, with several offices either closing or threatened with closure, these groups have demonstrated their worth in enhancing services for abused women. To date, there is no formal national association or network of homeless shelters, although groups such as the National Working Group on Women and Housing count homeless shelters among their members.

Chapter Five Critical Issues for Abused and Homeless Women

This chapter outlines the perceptions of the feasibility study key informants with respect to whether there is a substantial overlap between the populations of women who are homeless and women that are abused. Such an overlap would lend credibility to the argument that a national shelter association should include representation from both the violence against women and the homelessness sector.

In addition, the chapter presents a number of complexities in the lives of women abused by intimate partners and women who are homeless. Each key respondent was asked, "From your work, what are the most critical issues affecting homeless and abused women in Canada?" These sections highlight the context of these women's lives and provide some evidence for why the services that have been developed to assist them are sometimes inadequate to cope with the multiple and systemic issues. Included are issues specific to Aboriginal and immigrant women, mental health, substance abuse and women in the sex trade.

Overlap of the Populations of Homeless and Abused Women

An issue that is somewhat obscured in the literature is the extent to which women who are homeless have been abused or that women who are abused are at risk of becoming homeless. Each of the key informants was asked, "How much overlap is there between homeless women and woman affected by violence and abuse in your region/province?" The first set of quotes is from representatives of the VAW sector.

Quite a bit. We participated in a study with the City of Edmonton. They did a qualitative study with ten homeless women. They didn't ask about abuse, but eight out of ten volunteered that information. I think there is a horrendous overlap. A lot of the women have been abused as children. Sexual assault is an undercurrent that would be present in both groups and may be even more common for homeless women. Sexual abuse is often an issue for women coming to shelter. It would be similar for homeless women; and probably very vulnerable if they are living on the street. There is a lot of commonality between violence against women sector and the homeless sector. (VAW sector)

A large percentage. Often one leads to the other. The abuse leads to homelessness; the threat of homelessness leads to abuse because a woman goes back to the abusive partner rather than live in poverty. This is not dealt with. I have not been able to find any departments who share that information or are involved in any discussions around it. (VAW sector)

One U.S. statistic indicated 90% of homeless women reached that state due to violence. I have no corroboration for our region or any Canadian statistics. Because of overcrowding, a number of women are seeking accommodation to improve their standard of living. (VAW sector)

It is one of those areas that get ignored. We have YWCA's who provide both homeless and violence against women services. We also find that women who are homeless have often experienced violence as well, which then led to their homeless situation. There is an integration point. The two are not separate for women. However, provincial and municipal funders look at it differently. We

know there is a strong connection between women experiencing homelessness and incidents of violence in their lives. We see it from the research; we see that from the actual experience in the shelters. There needs to be a reconnection or even a connection of these two areas when it comes to funding. (VAW sector)

There's a fair overlap. We will share clients on a number of occasions, where women are moving through different turning points in their lives, while the mandates are different but solutions the same. Most of our clients whether homeless or presenting in crisis from an abusive situation have some kind of addiction or mental health issue. We're seeing hard drug use and drinking. The mental health issues vary. As in other parts of Canada, the responsibility for mental health and addiction have been downloaded onto the communities. It's gone from institutionalization of those particular groups to an unwillingness on the provincial level to address those particular issues. (VAW sector)

Most of them are affected by homelessness if they are abused. It's one of the major reasons women don't leave, if they don't know where they're going to go. They only have 3 weeks to stay in the shelter; they feel if they don't find a place they will be out on the street. (VAW sector)

They are the same population. But, because they are addressed by different agencies, they are seen as different. Women at the battered women's shelter tend to be seen as victims, which they are. Homeless women are seen as not as victims but as people who determine their own fate, as perpetrators. (VAW sector)

This population has so few options, not only in terms of housing but in terms of childcare education, help for their overlapping issues (drug abuse, alcohol abuse). Unless we have some sort of supportive society where women can get help for all these issues, nothing is going to get better. I see a lot of issues overlapping for these populations. I think that there is a huge overlap. Because of the way our system is set up in the north, housing becomes the number one reason for women not leaving the abusive situation. I would be very surprised if you could find a few women on the streets [city] or other communities who don't have that history of abuse. Not that they would initially present with it; there is a tendency for service providers to miss it and say that these women are just homeless. (VAW sector)

A number of the key informants clarified that, by definition, they consider abused women who come to a VAW shelter as homeless.

When an individual makes the choice to leave the abusive relationship, she becomes homeless. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Women who have experienced violence are often homeless, because they can't live in their home. It's intimately connected. If you're living in a women's shelter, you are homeless. (VAW sector)

As a women's abuse shelter, 100% of our clients are homeless due to violence. Our crisis line receives at least 4-15 calls a month enquiring about accommodation. (VAW sector)

Similarly, from the homelessness sector, many saw considerable overlaps in the populations.

I think there is a total overlap. When you find women living a violent situation, they are probably staying there because they have no place else to go. When they leave, there's still no place to go. In many cases, women are murdered by their ex-partners because they're in unsafe housing. They need affordable, safe housing. (Homeless sector)

There are certainly correlations between the experiences of homeless women and abused women. Poverty is the best way to describe the overriding daily challenges that these women face. (Homeless sector)

There is a lot of overlap. If you look at the girl homeless population, over 80% in the studies, have been abused. These may not be girls leaving abusive relationships or households, but the fact that they have been abused, shows that interconnection. Or say a woman leaves an abusive partner and manages to get into a shelter and then tries to move into accommodation. She can't get social housing, so she moves into a private rental, then one month she can't pay her rent. She gets evicted for arrears, and then she's homeless. That's a cycle we see happening frequently. There are a lot of different overlaps. (Homeless sector)

Almost any woman who is homeless has experienced violence to some degree. I would be quite surprised if she hasn't. It might not just be the precipitating cause of that particular moment that she ends up in a shelter. The shelter I used to work in was for women who were homeless in [city] did keep statistics: we asked women if they had ever experienced violence in the past. I think the response was about 80% that they had. (VAW sector)

From the few respondents that work in both homelessness and woman abuse come the following comments. Since these key informants work routinely with both populations, they spoke eloquently about the overlaps in these populations as well as some of the challenges.

One of the first ways that girls become homeless is because of sexual abuse at home. The Children's Ministry doesn't help them. If a girl goes for help, she will likely be told to go home or go to welfare. They are not dealing with anything even if girls are being abused at home. Girls experience so much violence when on their own and the men who are doing the violence are not being criminalized. (VAW & Homeless sector)

We see abused women who are sexually exploited. It is difficult for the VAW shelter movement to embrace women faced with street abuse. There are several factors: many of the women struggle with addictions, homelessness. The VAW shelters are not about housing homeless woman, they are about housing abused women who are fleeing domestic violence. There is stigma around street involved women. Even within the women's movement and the VAW shelter movement there isn't an understanding that she isn't being abused by one man; she's being abused by a pimp, a drug dealer, and every man who picks her up. I'm not sure the VAW shelters know how to work well with these women. They will take our clients if we can prove she was abused by just one man. I appreciate that there are children in the VAW shelters and the shelters need to protect them. VAW shelters aren't set up to accommodate women with addiction, mental health and

trauma issues. It points out a gap in [provincial/territorial] services. (VAW & Homeless sector)

There is a big connection between homelessness and family violence. I think all women are prone to face the economic fallout of seeking help. Say there's a family and family violence. He gets taken off the jail, the primary source of income in the family—or they might have joint child welfare, SFI case. He ends up homeless. She ends up homeless. The kids end up homeless. Then you have the affordability issue with housing and how do you get damage deposits. We take the position that while she needs assistance and help, there is no point without addressing the perpetrator's issues because he is going to find another woman to abuse. That's why we targeted treatment for perpetrators. No new victims, that is the notion we're going on. If you deal with the violence, you can get a lot accomplished. Homelessness is not the issue. It is an outcome. So let's stop what is driving it. (VAW & Homeless sector)

Women who have substance abuse or mental health problems are vulnerable to all kinds of abuse. Violence is a constant concern for homeless women, so overlapping between them and domestic violence victims is very common. Mental health problems, substance abuse and gambling are also often part of homeless women's life. Workers in first line resources will address the most urgent concern for these women, either it is food or shelter or needing a safe place to stay. (VAW & Homeless sector)

I suspect the majority of women who end up homeless suffer from childhood trauma which has forced them to survive in a different way. Homeless women are still the unaccepted population; people don't want to have anything to do with them. There's all kind of support for women and children who have been abused, and resources more available for them. Finding appropriate resources for homeless women is like pulling teeth. They're not a lobbying force to get funded. (VAW & Homeless sector)

The great majority of women have all been victims of family violence or childhood abuse. As women, they might be in the prostitute sector but most experienced violence in their early years. Women who have been sexually exploited are typically not recognized as abused. I think it's the many misperceptions around prostitution and sexual exploitation that get in the way of understanding that more fully. A woman who is tied to a pimp has a lot in common with a woman who is tied to an abusive husband. That is somehow not understood and it may be the sex for money part of it. I think that can create a gulf in women's groups and sectors. And then addictions. That's a big one. I think women are using drugs to cope with the violence and trauma in their lives. (VAW & Homeless sector)

Three non-governmental key informants noted that although there is some overlap, this is not a substantial point with respect to meeting their needs.

There is an overlap, but women who are on the street because of addiction or mental illness are really being missed. There are no shelters for them, no services. The women in relationship violence are reaching out, even though the wait periods may be extensive, and they may choose to return to the abusive

relationship. The women who are the true homeless are the ones we have no stats on, because they are surviving by going from place to place. (VAW sector)

For domestic violence survivors the situation is different. They are more organised, they haven't lost all of their means. They still have a house; they're able to take care of their children. The women here (at homeless shelter) have lost custody of their children a long time ago. They are much more disorganized. Many of them have been severally brutalised, battered, sexually abused as children. Those women have known violence all their lives. They never have had significant bonds, or they have experienced the breaking of all their significant bonds. Homeless women face exclusion. We accuse them of marginalizing themselves but we don't acknowledge their deep suffering. Many other groups aim at reintegration of women and I don't think it can work with all homeless women. They can't hold a job; they even have problems keeping an apartment. Maybe, after a long while, they can take a small job or do volunteer work, but first, they have to restore their own network. They don't have a "base" or a "foundation" since that all they have been in contact with since childhood is violence. We have all kinds of people here; we have nurses, engineers that have stopped functioning. Violence and homelessness is linked because violence causes the breaking of all significant bonds. (Homeless sector)

I don't think there is a whole lot of overlap. For abused women, while there needs to be a lot of healing from living in violence, it doesn't have the same lifelong barriers that are faced by women who end up homeless. Women who end up homeless have much more complex issues. Their behaviours do not encourage support. They are disenfranchised from systems and any support available. I think there's a clear distinction around that. (VAW & Homeless sector)

The government representatives from the VAW sector were about equally likely to identify overlaps and to point out differences or to be less emphatic about the commonalities, as in the following quotes.

I had a really hard time, years ago, calling abused women "homeless". I would be indignant and say, "Abused women are not homeless. It's just that they're homes are not safe." The abuser should be homeless, not the women and children. I still hate lumping abused women in with homeless women. Homelessness among women is another serious tragedy. Often you can find the roots for women's homelessness in violence, for example in childhood, but it is different. It should be viewed as two problems that have overlapping issues. A lot of homeless women, when you look at their histories, have developed mental health issues because of abuse in childhood. The root might be the same, but there are different solutions, different priorities to address. So, I still don't identify women leaving abusive relationships as homeless; they should have priority placement in housing because they are leaving unsafe homes. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Homelessness really has to do with addictions and mental health issues. The people who are chronically homeless are the ones with the most difficulties. I think there is some overlap. People leave their homes for a variety of reasons. Our primary focus in our department is to ensure that children are protected from

abuse and neglect. If a family doesn't have a place to live, it's going to impact on their ability to protect their children. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Other representatives from the government sector echoed the majority of VAW and Homeless sector key informant that identified considerable overlap.

I think there would be a huge overlap. If it wasn't an issue initially, it would become an issue once a woman becomes homeless because her vulnerability increases. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

There is a huge overlap. Some abused women leave and all they need is a safe place to stay, but if the abuse has gone on for years or if it is intergenerational they have different issues. A lot of women end up on the streets after leaving. Some transition homes in smaller communities will take homeless women because they see an overlap and believe that they are victims of economic abuse. (Housing Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Many studies have found that rates of family violence more prevalent - exceptionally high - amongst homeless people. Abuse in childhood is extremely prevalent among homeless. Family violence is the main cause of homelessness amongst families. A greater vulnerability to abuse because they are homeless; in fact there is this vulnerability even in homeless shelters. There is evidence that women using homeless shelters are vulnerable to further abuse, as is the case for women living on the street. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Intersecting Critical Issues for Women

While the following sections document a number of issues that the key respondents see as critical for abused and homeless women; many issues overlap and when women are members of marginalized groups the barriers and challenges are often compounded. Known as “intersectionality”, the phrase captures the complexities of not only these women’s lives but the solutions needed to address their multiple and significant needs. These quotes exemplify the concerns.

There are compounding issues for women who experience multiple barriers: not being able to access permanent housing, not being able to access child care, women needing to repair their lives with counselling or other services; mental health issues; addiction issues; economic barriers. Social assistance levels have been cut and women can't live on that. It's just multiple issues. Racism is another one; women are limited in their ability to move freely in society to avail economic security, all of that is compounded around issues of race and gender and lack of power in society. (VAW sector)

The workers in our shelters are confronted by their limits, intervention wise, because women's situations are becoming more complex. We are trying to solidify relationships with other homelessness resources to learn from their expertise. Many women present multiple issues. That is a real challenge. (VAW sector)

The population we deal with are marginalized and dealing with multiple issues. These women are sexually exploited; many have addiction and/or mental health issues. They've often lost their children and are trying to get them back from child welfare. It's almost impossible to find core funding for work with these women.

These women are citizens; they've been marginalized through poverty and racism, mental health, sexual exploitation. Nevertheless, they are citizens and I think public tax payer dollars should be going to help them in the early stages of their recovery. It is sorrowful that we can't get ongoing commitment to create caring early transitional places. (Homeless & VAW sector)

Poverty and Employment Issues for Women

Two issues identified by thirty-seven key respondents were poverty/the high cost of housing (16 from the VAW sector, 10 from the Homeless sector, 3 from the Homeless and VAW sector and 8 Provincial/Territorial govt. representatives); and twenty-seven interviewees commented on the difficulties that women face finding and maintaining employment at a living wage (10 from the VAW sector, 4 from the Homeless sector, 2 from the Homeless and VAW sector and 11 representatives from Provincial/Territorial govt.).

Some commented on the poverty in which their clients live as well as its long-term consequences. Simply the fact that women are poor can lead to their being discriminated against.

There are structuring elements that shape women's homelessness. Poverty's one of them. Women find themselves on the street not only because they do drugs or have mental health problems (in that case they usually know where to turn and there are specialized resources), but because they are poor. Women's poverty is increasing and they don't know where to turn for shelter. (Homeless sector)

Women were discriminated against because they were poor, because of the number of children. What played a bigger part in the discrimination was their financial situation, that they were single mothers mostly, and even more when they were immigrant women. That's the situation in bigger cities. We know that when a woman decides to leave a domestic violence shelter, she will face many obstacles. She will be poorer. (VAW sector)

Lack of income is one critical issue. There isn't enough money for women to live. Most of the people we're talking about are low income. They may have a place to live but they are struggling to keep it or they're behind in a hydro bill because the cost to heat some of these places is astronomical and their debt load continues to build. They don't have enough money to pay the rent to start with. Those women aren't homeless but they are the next homeless if one other thing happens in their life-one more tragedy then they're the next out in the street. (Homeless sector)

Many mentioned that provincial/territorial social assistance rates are inadequate.

The situation in [large city] is absolutely desperate. I can't believe the change over the last decade. The cost of market rental has skyrocketed, and the income assistance rate for one woman and one child is \$520/month. There is no way a woman can get an apartment for that amount. Landlords discriminate against people on income assistance and single mothers. (VAW sector)

Often women's homelessness is caused, if not by violence and abuse, by just one emergency in their life which has made them fall into arrears in their rent, which has led to their eviction. Because welfare rates are so low, it is very difficult for

women to pay back what they owe and then it's difficult for them to find first and last month's rent. (Homeless sector)

Social assistance rates have not kept pace with the rental increases. I'm sure we're not unique, that with the housing allowance you get, you can't get good quality housing. People are dipping into their living allowance to get a better apartment or home. One of the bigger issues is the high poverty we see in the shelter. (VAW sector)

The social assistance rates are so low, women have to decide if they are going to pay the rent or feed the kids. Many women don't eat, don't take medication, don't go to the dentist. Sometimes their kids don't eat, they use food banks. Housing is a poverty issue. The public does get up in arms when a woman is murdered by her partner but it's hard to draw a straight line between murder and child care. But if you ask abused women, they'll say they go back because of the poverty they'd face on their own. If we could say, "we can set you up in safe, affordable housing; there's work and day care" things would be a lot better. (VAW sector)

Canada developed the Child Tax. But if you are on social assistance in [province/territory], they claw that money back. That has a huge impact on women's and children poverty. It's so offensive that the major federal undertaking to address women's poverty gets taken away. In Manitoba and Newfoundland that money isn't clawed back. What we are lobbying for, locally, provincially, is to give that money back to the women. Women are already cutting into their food money or money for basic necessities to pay rent. If they could have that money, they could buy groceries rather than accessing the food bank. (Homeless sector)

Others commented on women's difficulties with employability or access to employment that provides adequate wages to sustain family needs.

A number of agencies called Women's Sustainable Livelihood Network work towards supporting proposals and projects to help abuse survivors access employment training. It's not just employment; it's the readiness of the woman, and dealing with the aftermath of the abuse. Basically, helping woman ready themselves emotionally and mentally for employment. (VAW sector)

When they do find a job, it's usually at minimum wage. Lack of work, lack of pay equity if they do find employment. There isn't pay equity legislation in [province/territory]. Many women are low skilled and cannot survive on minimum wage so end up going back to their abuser. (VAW sector)

It won't be enough to pump money to new affordable housing. That will help but there are other issues that need to be tackled: reform to income security programs of all kinds from minimum wages, increasing the eligibility from Employment Insurance, increasing provincial and territorial rates of income assistance for those who are unable to work or are having difficulty finding or holding work. People need to have greater income security. Once they have that, they have the means to find housing that is appropriate. (Homeless sector)

You can't begin to get yourself ready for the workforce when you haven't got a safe place to stay or a safe place to resolve the issues you are working on. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Aboriginal Women Issues of Abuse and Homelessness

Representing all provinces and territories in Canada, forty-nine key informants (18 VAW representatives, 9 homeless sector representatives, 4 homeless and VAW representatives, 18 government representatives) spoke of the critical issues faced by Aboriginal women. The respondents stressed that the issues raised in this section are complex and intersect with one another, but nevertheless attempted to highlight their concerns.

They perceive Canada's history of colonization, discrimination and marginalization by the dominant culture serves as an overarching issue that influences the reality of abused and homeless Aboriginal women today. The following quotes eloquently describe the history and consequences of these issues:

For Aboriginal women, homelessness, abuse and poverty tie together through racism, classism, sexism. (VAW & Homeless sector)

In the North, a lot of people suffer from trauma related to colonization, racism, residential schooling and cultural collapse. Entire communities have such high levels of abuse that people have never experienced any other way of living. How can we help communities effectively break that cycle and re-establish healthy norms? For me, that is the biggest issue. (VAW sector)

74% of the women who use our shelters are Aboriginal. They're dealing with the effects of cultural genocide. They may have been living in substandard housing before they came to the shelter. The whole issue is very complex. (VAW sector)

On any given day over 50% of the women in our off-reserve VAW shelters are Aboriginal women, when Aboriginal people make up 8-10% of the population in [province/territory]. That is significant. It's also extremely complex. When you look at the plight of Aboriginal people across this country, it's not much different. When you look at the Stolen Sisters Project or the Highway of Tears in BC or talk to the people that serve Aboriginal women more generally, it's very deep-seated. It's in marginalization generally. The communities have high violence rates. It's a significant issue. The on-reserve shelters are federal jurisdiction not provincial. It is a significant issue because over-representation isn't just in VAW shelters. There's over-representation in the criminal justice system, in our medical systems, in our child welfare system. What do Aboriginal communities need to support their own people? (VAW Provincial/Territorial government)

The key informants raised a number of issues specific to Aboriginal women living on reserves. As mentioned earlier in this report, (in Chapter Three regarding key informants' perceptions of housing in Canada), many respondents expressed concern about housing on reserves. The following quotes expand the discussion.

We know that poor women have the worst housing conditions in Canada. Aboriginal poor women have the worst housing in the country. (Homeless sector)

Lack of housing has resulted in a lot of our women having to use shelter and transition homes and influences the rates of homelessness. The out-migration is often out of no choice. It's for survival. A lot of women would have liked to stay in their communities, but there's no housing stock. (VAW sector)

Overcrowding is also on the reserve. There is a five year line-up for housing on the reserve I come from. They have people living in old trailers, in third world conditions. Of course there are horrific water problems on reserves. People are getting sick from the water. Large numbers of people are living in the same home. There is chronic over-crowding, this is standard. (Homeless sector)

In northern [province/territory], the housing situation is abysmal. In the northern reserves, there are no houses, 10 or more people in each house. They're fly-in communities, and for the general population, there is nowhere to live. The housing is run down; they can't keep it up because of limited resources. A woman who has been abused had nowhere to go. The hospital has to deal with the abuse, maybe give them a bed overnight. We're trying to get an on-reserve shelter but we haven't resolved the problem of where they go to when they leave the shelter. It is a crisis up north, the biggest issue they face. How can you address anything else, if people don't have anywhere to live? (VAW sector)

When a woman is being abused and is also living on a reserve, she faces a number of barriers and dilemmas.

Access to services is a critical issue because many women either aren't able to access services or need assistance doing that. Domestic violence is a huge issue on northern reserves, but there is no access to services. If they want to access services, it means leaving everything (home, family, friends). (VAW sector)

There are huge issues for Aboriginal women on reserves. If they leave their home due to abuse, they lose their status and don't have a home on the reserve. Aboriginal women on reserves in remote communities have nowhere to go, nowhere to flee. The only option is to fly them out. The other option is having a safe house on reserve. This is difficult because the reserves aren't that big, so the safe house isn't that safe. (VAW Provincial/Territorial government)

Aboriginal women are victims of domestic abuse at three times the rate of non-Aboriginal women. Their vulnerability to homelessness is even greater than mainstream population. The housing situation on the reserves is such that women are put at an extra disadvantage. If they are forced to flee the abuse, they end up in overcrowded, substandard housing. (VAW Provincial/Territorial government)

For Aboriginal women, the community is so important in providing support, but it is also where they are abused. Leaving those communities to escape abuse presents additional challenges for them because it is also the place of solace for them. (VAW Provincial/Territorial government)

The key informants also identified a number of critical issues related to on-reserve VAW shelters. As previously noted, it is often difficult for women on reserve to reach a shelter; indeed, her reserve may not have a shelter.

The critical issues for Aboriginal women on reserve are, first, to have a place to be safe. We need more shelters on reserves because we have one of the highest rate of domestic violence in Canada, and more than half of all women entering non-Aboriginal VAW shelters identify themselves as Aboriginal. (VAW sector)

There are many remote communities where women have a three hour drive on a dirt road to get to a shelter. (VAW sector)

In addition, on-reserve VAW shelters are funded by the federal government, not the provincial government. Several respondents highlighted differences or even discrimination in terms of the funding.

Until recently if an on-reserve shelter accepted women who weren't from that reserve, the shelter would not get funding for them. The ministry recently agreed to fund those women. Yet if a woman on reserve goes to an off-reserve shelter, that shelter has always received funding from Indian Affairs. (VAW sector)

Staff at First Nations shelters are not paid the same as non-Aboriginal shelters. We need our non-Aboriginal sisters to help us achieve equality in our own communities. We need to be treated with respect and dignity. (Homeless sector)

Another dilemma faced by women on reserves is the barrier created by Matrimonial Real Property. It intersects with the issues regarding housing, difficulty of accessing VAW shelters or other resources.

If a woman has to leave to be safe, she has no place to live because the house is usually under the man's name. Under Matrimonial Real Property, the women have no access to the home. If she wants a place to live, she has to return to him. Women on reserve have no rights. If her husband dies, she has no right to that house either. Because of the Matrimonial Real Property, if women on reserve want a place to live, they either have to move to the city or move back to their spouse. The only other choice is to move in with other family members and there's usually overcrowding. Housing is bad in the province, so even if women move, the cost of housing is so high, women can't afford it. Sometimes we've transferred women to other shelters when she can't find a place to live. Sometimes we extend her for two or three months. We just keep on extending until she can find something. (VAW sector)

Because of Matrimonial Real Property women fleeing abuse don't have a home to return to, so they go off reserve and they usually come to the city because they hope the city will have more opportunities. (Homeless sector)

Aboriginal women also have other jurisdictional issues with which they must contend.

Aboriginal women have the added difficulty of jurisdictional issues. If she is First Nations with Status, the provincial government hands the responsibility of funding to the federal government. The federal government says housing is the responsibility of the province. So she gets lost. (VAW & Homeless sector)

Aboriginal women on reserve don't even have the same rights under the Charter that other women have. We've been working with [social assistance] about who

gets benefits, when. If you are a normally a resident on reserve, then the Band has responsibility. If you normally live off reserve, then provincial social services is responsible. If a woman is abused and leaving and-she's normally a resident on reserve, but she's not going back, social assistance then becomes problematic trying to get services. (VAW sector)

One government representative noted that, if women leave the northern reserves in search of housing and/or safety from abuse for themselves or their children, the ministry will not aid women who then wish to return if they find the cultural shock of the south too great.

They have such strong ties to their culture and their land. There is no way for us to help them get back home and no place to put them even if we did. (VAW Provincial/Territorial government)

Considering these intersecting issues and barriers, it is understandable that Aboriginal women face a number of dilemmas when they are abused and/or homeless. Some women ultimately decide to go off reserve in search of the ability to meet their basic needs, and to gain a measure of safety from their abusive partner. Yet when women move off reserve, they often face issues of racism and discrimination from the dominant society.

With our Aboriginal population, discrimination is an issue. They are the poorest, most marginalized people in our society. The ones with the least voice. (VAW sector)

Homelessness is compounded because of discrimination and pre-conceived ideas of what the woman is like, whether it is housing or employment. It can make it more difficult for services to work with women if they do not understand the cultural background. (Housing Provincial/Territorial government)

The further away a woman is from being white, middle class, the more judgment is placed on her. There is less empathy, and it is more difficult to reach services. Services are not built to meet the needs of a diverse population. Everyone expects the woman to be white and middle class, but also completely innocent. She is expected not to act out to protect herself, to have no mental health or addictions issues. The further away, the easier it is to blame them for their own situation. (VAW Provincial/Territorial government)

Aboriginal women may face discrimination from the dominant society when they attempt to secure housing and employment.

It's not easy, especially for Aboriginal women. A lot of landlords won't rent to Aboriginal women. They seem to get away with this. (VAW sector)

If you're going for a rental, the issue of racism is there. Given the lack of housing, and because of the stereotypes, access to housing is an issue. Racism also affects the job opportunities open to Aboriginal women. (VAW sector)

Racism may prevent Aboriginal women from obtaining the most secure jobs—jobs with benefits. Discrimination can make it difficult for women to find a place to live. (Homeless sector)

Women who had been living on reserve, particularly remote reserves with little regular access to larger centres, may find themselves experiencing culture shock.

Aboriginal women coming off reserves have a lot of issues from having to leave their home communities to ending up in a city which is completely unfamiliar territory. (Homeless sector)

We see more and more Native women in [city], partly because they don't have many resources in their communities. They face domestic violence, overpopulated houses so, thinking they will find better services, they leave for the city. But health and social services are different for Native people on reserves. They don't have identification or social insurance cards. They feel helpless, it gets very complicated, and they will be referred to inappropriate resources. Native women get discouraged; they won't ask for help and become homeless. (VAW sector)

When Native women run from domestic violence and leave, they lose everything, house, land, everything. They leave not only their spouse but also the community. They have to find an apartment and face discrimination when they say they are Natives and have 4 or 5 children. Because of the housing conditions on our reserves, they are used to living 3 or 4 families together so they will try to bring their children and other parts of their families in with them. It gets difficult to do in a city apartment. (VAW sector)

Aboriginal women coming off of reserves need a lot of support. Sometimes they have large families and it is difficult to find housing. We need policies that allow people to make decisions that help; for example, to enlarge a suite to give the family enough room without having to go to the government or other authorities every time something is needed. (VAW Provincial/Territorial government)

Across Canada, what's most alarming is to consider Native women and their children's poverty and the conditions they live in. Those women have very little power and little to say within their own communities. There are very few services they can turn to on reserve. They come to [city] and end up on the streets. What's most troubling is that for a number of Native women, there will be no way out and some of them die. Some white homeless women also die on the streets, but a good number of them meet a worker that will make a difference and they escape from the street. But for Native women it's very hard to get help. They won't go to services for white women. In [city] there are not enough services to answer that specific population's needs. (VAW & Homeless sector)

In addition, non-Aboriginal services may lack cultural sensitivity. According to the key informants some of the barriers to services could be systemic; other barriers are created by individual staff members displaying discriminatory or racist attitudes.

Aboriginal women face racism, both systemic and individual. Programs and services are not designed to be culturally sensitive. They encounter racist attitudes from frontline workers, and tend to stay away from the services. They go once and don't return. (Government representative)

Historical feelings about systems impact people. Many Aboriginal people don't want to get too involved in the system, or feel it doesn't work for them. There are

racial biases, both systemic and within staff people, which might not be blatant but can be patronizing. Language can be an issue for Aboriginal people coming from reserves. It can be a culture shock. I don't know if our language and practices are as open as we think they are. (VAW sector)

Living in the North has opened my eyes to intergenerational impact of trauma from colonization, racism, and cultural collapse. This must be addressed if Aboriginal women and communities are to have quality of life. Diversity needs to be embraced to a greater extent in our country. We don't help by blaming women for their choices rather than improving their range of choices. (VAW sector)

Services don't apply a cultural lens to how services are provided to marginalized peoples. A class lens should be applied as well. A values base that minimizes violence and perpetuates isolation around reaching out is problematic. Language and addictions are also issues. (VAW sector)

One respondent described how they are taking steps to address discrimination and lack of cultural sensitivity towards First Nations women on the part of dominant culture staff.

We have developed partnerships with [Aboriginal women's shelters]. We want to "twin" shelters, members of our network, and Native women shelters. We will create a training program that will be offered to all our members across every region. This one day session will be followed by a meeting with Native women workers to discuss, exchange and create connections between the two groups. The project will end with a provincial meeting pulling in all the expertise developed on both sides: expertise on domestic violence and new practice tools on one part, and expertise on Native women's reality and needs on the second part. The hope is that off-reserve shelters will gain expertise in working appropriately with Native women; and that Native women shelter workers will develop a practice and expertise in using tools specific to domestic violence situations within their community shelters. (VAW sector)

Other respondents do not have the funding to significantly address cultural insensitivity in the services they offer.

We really don't have the resources to fully incorporate cultural programming in what we do. (VAW sector)

Mental Health Issues for Homeless and Abused Women

Mental health for both homeless and abused women was identified as a critical issue by 32 key informants (15 VAW representatives, 3 homeless representatives, 1 homeless and VAW representative, 13 government representatives).

I don't think mental illness issues are really addressed. (VAW sector)

Some women have major mental health issues and I think that makes them even more vulnerable to violence because people won't necessarily believe them or take them seriously if they are assaulted. I think one thing impacts the other: violence brings about mental health issues and may be a contributing factor, and

on the other hand, being homeless contributes to mental health issues. So it is a circle. (Homeless sector)

An emerging issue for both sectors is the increased incidence of mental health issues. When women are experiencing barriers it's inhuman. Having to live in that constant underpinning of pressing issues on an ongoing basis creates this very human reaction to an inhuman situation. (VAW sector)

Several key informants commented that the 1980s and 1990s policies to deinstitutionalize individuals with mental health problems in their provinces/territories contributed to the difficulties faced by women experiencing mental health symptoms.

We've had waves of deinstitutionalization when many beds were lost in the psychiatric system and community care was introduced. But community care didn't really materialize and there weren't housing options. (Homeless sector)

As indicated in the above comment, respondents were concerned that deinstitutionalization has not translated into increased community services for women who face mental health issues in addition to being homeless and/or abused. They identified a lack of services as another barrier.

It's so layered for women. If you have mental health issue, or are a young mom, or a sexual abuse survivor, that comes on top of other issues. It's way more complex to engage a system that may not be working well. (VAW sector)

Women with mental health issues have particularly high needs. There is a general lack of resources for them: a lack of housing programs and support systems. (VAW sector)

A critical issue for both populations is the effects of long-term abuse, "Oh you're depressed, have a pill." Never a question about why you might be depressed. (VAW sector)

While most key informants commented that lack of services in their home provinces or territories contributed to women's difficulty to accessing treatment, one respondent noted that the women themselves may also be hesitant to access services.

Mental health is a big issue. Often times, women are undiagnosed and untreated. There's reluctance among this population to use services. (Housing Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Several respondents commented that many VAW shelters do not have the services in place to deal with the added complexity of women who also have mental health issues. This lack can mean that women with mental health issues who are also abused by their intimate partners may not to be able to access the safety or services that these shelters offer.

Women with children are the priority in VAW shelters. They may not have the right staff or services for women with mental health issues. You need special staffing for that, it's hard for VAW shelters to accommodate. Most shelters take just the high priority women: battered women with children. (Housing Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Sometimes if women are abused and have a mental health label, they get moved on. The women aren't necessarily easy to work with and VAW staff already felt these women were overwhelming to take. I've been involved in a lot of discussions about whether these women could be dangerous to other women in the shelter, or would they put the children at risk. What if the other clients or children were afraid of the women? (Homeless sector)

Similarly, respondents commented that many homeless shelters also lacked services to help women with the added complexity of mental health issues.

In the homeless shelters, mental health is an issue. We have too many clients on (disability incomes). That's huge. We find a high rate of mental health admissions. Mental health services are provided through a commitment to be in some homeless shelters, but it isn't across the board. There isn't enough mental health support in the homeless shelters. (Housing Provincial/Territorial govt.)

The (local mental health) institute is threatening to close down part of its available psychiatric beds. Where do women go? Our resources for women with housing, addictions and mental health issues usually only allow stays for short term periods. (VAW sector)

The respondents were also concerned that women with mental health issues could face even greater barriers than other women in their search for employment, as well as for safe and affordable housing.

Whether people are dealing with lifelong abuse or more recent assaults, there is trauma. Women that are traumatized are often depressed. If you are not getting the supports you need, you end up with a variety of difficulties. You can't begin to get yourself ready for the workforce when you haven't got a safe place to stay or a safe place to resolve the issues you are working on. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

There is little access to safe and affordable housing for women. There are various reasons for that, but that's one deficiency we've noticed in the follow-up part of interventions, mostly when women leave institutional resources, like jail or hospital. We've heard of one program that helps former mental health patients access to housing, and other resources that provide supervised housing. So there are some ad hoc programs but mostly women feel that there's not enough. It's seems everything is dissociated and information fragmented. (Homeless sector)

We have certain populations of women who cannot find a place to live after leaving the shelter—particularly women with mental health. Their ability to access housing is hampered by this. There's a lot of discrimination there. A lot of stereotyping. Everyone knows everybody; we live in a rural community, so there's a lot of discrimination. (VAW sector)

Visible Minority, Immigrant and Refugee Women

In response to the open-ended question about what issues they saw as most critical for homeless and abused women in Canada, thirty-nine key respondents (14 VAW sector, 9 from the Homeless sector, 2 from the VAW & homeless sector and 14 from the Provincial/Territorial government representatives) mentioned issues specific to immigrant

and refugee women and those from visible minorities. A significant issue was with respect to discrimination.

It's a layering of the issue. Women of colour are not so marginalized by colour but there could be some discrimination. Immigrant women have language issues and tend to be employed in low paying service sectors. (Homeless sector)

Issues of colour and racism, Discrimination. We ghettoize people, we bring in newcomers that are refugees and don't provide support. Many people we are working with don't know the dominant language, and they come here and can't get jobs because of the colour of their skin. (VAW sector)

For immigrant women, there can be language barriers. How do they find out about their rights in Canada, especially when their partners are controlling the information to which they have access? (VAW sector)

Our staff often encounter cases where women being abused will handle it the same way she would in her home culture in Africa or Asia; she travels as far as her money allows her and hopes she won't be found. Often she does that without any advanced planning, such as finding out what services might be available. We've had VAW shelters refuse to help her because they say her safety is no longer at risk because her partner is in a different province. So very complex situations and in immediate need of everything. (Homeless sector)

Several respondents commented on the additional complication of an abusive partner also being the woman's sponsor.

Immigrant women are misled by abused partners and often prevented from getting citizenship. (VAW sector)

For women from diverse or marginalized backgrounds there are additional constraints. For example, women who have immigrated here are told by their partners that if they leave, he'll break sponsorship and she'll be deported. Or they just don't know their legal rights here. (VAW sector)

For newcomer women there is a REAL lack of social support services. This is especially true for women who come to Canada under sponsorship and then that sponsorship breaks down for whatever reason, often, marital breakdown. (Homeless sector)

Issues of Substance Abuse

The availability of substances and its impact on abused and homeless women were mentioned by thirty-six key informants (18 from the VAW sector, 4 from the Homeless sector, 2 from VAW & Homeless sector, 12 government representatives). The addictive substances ranged from illegal drugs to alcohol to prescription medications.

Women victims of domestic violence are more susceptible to developing difficulties, sometimes drug or alcohol addictions. What's difficult is that women come as victims of domestic violence, some have minor mental health problems as depression and may be over-medicated. Some have developed prescribed drug addictions. So many women present multiple issues. (VAW sector)

The new drugs, which allow people to self-medicate, also have an impact. We see people who might not have had problems before be impacted by them, and it is a detriment to their survival (employment, housing). (VAW sector)

One statistic is that 80% of women who have substance abuse problems have also had abuse. I think it leads to this downward spiral to homelessness. When you have substance abuse you start on this road. (VAW sector)

One of our biggest concerns is the rise of prescription drugs. They're misused and sold. It's been identified as an issue in our transition houses (VAW) for both staff and board. Women are stressed, they end up on drugs. (VAW sector)

On average there are 3 crack addicted babies being born every week in [city]. We have a very high birth rate. There are no supports for these women and children. They go into the hospital; social services will take the babies away. There is no support to get their babies back. (Homeless sector)

Some key informants explained the unique housing barriers of individuals with substance addictions.

Women who are trying to detox and are waiting for treatment, or they come out of treatment and are waiting for follow-up housing or they are just stuck and homeless for a while. (Homeless sector)

Difficulty accessing services and housing for women with substance abuse issues was a common concern.

In [city], substance abuse is a huge issue. A lot of shelters and transition houses are not willing to take women who are actively using, and that creates a lot of difficulties for these women. Substance use issues (people using just to cope with their situation), Substance use, and women in recovery may not be taken by landlords because of previous situation (no credit rating, no landlord reference). (VAW sector)

Some women in homeless shelters are substance users and very probably would have experienced violence. There are women who are substance users. Sometimes it is a response; a kind of self medication for mental health. But they really don't have a lot of resources so they tend to circulate through the homeless shelter system as well. There aren't enough treatment programs. (Homeless sector)

Crystal meth, crack and drug use are making it even harder, as the shelters evict women who are using drugs. (VAW sector)

The VAW shelters put up significant criteria. Some require that women have two weeks being clean and sober. But women can detox from crack in 3-5 days. This woman was being threatened by her drug dealer saying he was going to kill her; we couldn't find any place to take her. I sat with another woman for three hours. She'd left her abusive partner 6 weeks ago, stayed in a hotel and used. The shelters said that because she'd been away that long, she was no longer being abused; she was simply homeless with resurfacing addictions. We finally got social assistance to pay for a week's hotel until she could get into drug treatment. (VAW & Homeless sector)

Issues for Sexually Exploited Women

Another population of concern for sixteen key informants is women who work in the sex-trade, many of whom are addicted to substances (mentioned by 6 from the VAW sector, 3 from the Homeless sector, 1 from the VAW & Homeless sector, 6 government representatives). Several mentioned their difficulties accessing housing.

Sexually exploited women have limited access to housing. The vast majority exist outside of the mainstream. They are on the edge; they have lost their ID in their homeless and addicted state. When you're street involved and addicted, you will come in conflict in the law. The police use techniques to harass women on the street: trespassing, littering charges. Those are by-law infractions. You get a ticket, and you don't pay; or you prostitute to pay the ticket. If you rack up unpaid funds, you can't get ID. You can't get a bank account. So many doors are closed to you if you don't have ID. (Homeless & VAW sector)

So many young women are staying with guys to have a place to stay, and is exploitative itself. Sometimes, the older man will start to pimp them, and that's obviously an issue. There's just not enough being done to stop the sexual exploitation of girls. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Others mentioned that women practice “survival sex” in order to find accommodation.

The climate plays a large part in homelessness. It is hard to be absolutely homeless here in the winter. Women find themselves in compromising situations, using strategies such as “survival sex” to find a place to stay. It is much more severe in the north because of the climate; a person does not have much chance of making it through the night outside here. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Rents are kept just above the rate of social services. People are paying the rent by turning to crime and prostitution. (Homeless sector)

Women fighting addictions, especially younger women, who end up couch surfing are also in need of programs. There's a lack of funding and a lack of recognition that there is a need, lack of support systems. We have young people either running away from group homes or abuse at home, they trade sex for a place to sleep (“couch surfing”). (VAW sector)

Other key informants commented on the difficulty that women who are sexually exploited have accessing services.

We see women who are sexually exploited as abused women. But it is difficult for the shelter movement to embrace women faced with street abuse. Many of the women also struggle with addictions, homelessness. The VAW shelters say they are not about housing homeless woman, they are about housing abused women fleeing domestic violence. I think there is stigma around street involved women. Even within the women's movement and the shelter movement there isn't an understanding that she isn't being abused by one man; she's being abused by a pimp, a drug dealer, and every man who picks her up. (VAW & Homeless sector)

There are concerns about women and the sex trade; there are curfews that prevent them from working, shelter staff asking them to leave if they find out that they are working. (VAW sector)

Sexually exploited women are often homeless. There is a real lack of programs to meet their needs. They opened a shelter here, and it worked very well, but then the pilot was over and the government refused to fund it. (VAW sector)

Most safe houses have a rule that girls using drugs cannot be in the safe houses.. There are not enough detox and treatment beds, and most are not specific to youth and are co-ed. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Because sexually exploited women often use substances, several informants commented on the issues together.

Discrimination exists in many social services in terms of service provision for drug addicted women. Not all will be served in shelters; sometimes shelters cannot support their needs. But there is discrimination, same for sex trade workers. There is a lot of discrimination for both drug addicted and sex trade workers. Just getting off the street is very complicated. (VAW sector)

Sex trade workers are another critical issue especially in the urban area. They are developing a program to try and address this problem as well. They're trying to help women get off drugs and protect them. (VAW sector)

Additional Critical Populations of Abused and Homeless Women

This section documents additional circumstances for Canadian women that result in more complexity in emerging from homelessness or intimate partner abuse. These include living in rural/remote communities, young women, single women, older women, women with disabilities and women with health problems.

Twenty-three key respondents spoke about the difficulties encountered by abused and homeless women who live in rural areas. The key issue is lack of accessible services and social isolation.

We've struggled for years to think of a model that would work in an area that is sparsely populated, but then about 50,000 roll in for the summer. Women up there are extremely isolated, and when they're at risk, they are really at risk. Some of our most serious cases have come from there. Having a safe house and VAW services was a compelling need, but not needed every day. In comparing the need of rural areas vs. urban areas, in rural areas there may be fewer women, but each woman may be even more isolated and in even more desperate circumstances, which can easily be quite unknown to her neighbours. (VAW sector)

There is a difference between the needs of urban and rural women because women in urban areas have more access to transportation, jobs, training, what have you. Women in rural areas have little or none of that. There's no transportation system at all, very few jobs. Women go back home because there are so few options. There's even less housing because social housing is rarely built in the country and women don't want to move to towns. They want to stay in

their home communities because of the kids going to school. It's hard and it's stressful on women because if they move it's a life change. (VAW sector)

The biggest difference between rural and urban is the lack of services and resources in rural. Homelessness in rural areas is more hidden. The winter climate doesn't allow people to be outside, so what you get is people moving from couch to couch. (Homeless sector)

Eighteen interviewees mentioned problems with respect to serving older women, whether abused or homeless.

The situation of senior women is getting worse. People who are retiring might be seen as mainstream now but they are going to be homeless later. (Homeless sector)

A lot of older women have difficulty finding housing, especially those between 50 and 60. When they have left a partner, it's difficult to rent a place on their own. The women need secure housing, in a secure building. They don't qualify for senior's housing until they're 60. (VAW sector)

Older women can have problems resulting from lifelong abuse or new problems due to increased dependency or frailty. When working with older women, workers have to be sensitive to these issues. It can take a lot longer to have success because of those compounding issues. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Older single women are the poorest - even poorer than single moms, but because they don't have children, and because they're seniors, they don't get as much attention, but they're very, very poor. (Housing Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Thirteen interviewees mentioned complications in accessing services for single women, those without children.

Single women don't have much. There is a movement to get some housing for women who are homeless, but most of the push is for families. (VAW sector)

A big challenge is certain populations of women who have nowhere to go after the shelter stay. Our length of stays are longer than they should be because of this. Particularly single women who require smaller apartments. In this region there are a limited number of small housing units. (VAW sector)

For years the priority for subsidized housing was for seniors and families. We have high numbers of single people who are under 50 and very little housing options that are subsidised available to them. Very, very little. That's changing some. But single non-elderly people would be on waiting lists far more than five years because they are not given priority and there was no housing built as one bedrooms. (Homeless sector)

Obviously women with children stand a better chance of getting housing because it does affect more than one person; but it's always a big issue for single non-elderly women to access affordable housing. (Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Women with disabilities were identified as of critical concern by eleven key informants.

Women with disabilities face a host of problems when trying to find housing. There is relative homelessness for them. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

As for older women and handicapped women, we don't know as much about their reality since it is so poorly documented. We have to be careful in those particular situations; the abuser is often the natural caregiver. We have to work with social services for care when they want to leave their home and sometimes it gets very difficult. We have to adapt ourselves and work with the other community services to answer their specific needs. (VAW sector)

For women with disabilities, the shelters are not physically set up to meet these needs; we don't have resources to meet their needs. (VAW sector)

Women with physical health issues, which overlaps with disabilities to some extent, were identified as a concern for ten key informants.

The most critical issues for homeless and abused women is health. Many of the women coming to our shelter are suffering from chronic illnesses whether they are respiratory, fibromyalgia, a lot of gastro-intestinal issues, chronic dental issues. (VAW sector)

There is such a correlation between illness and abuse. When you live in an abusive relationship for any time, you have mental and physical health issues. How do we help women stay employable? (VAW Provincial/Territorial sector)

The third most critical issue is people with unresolved physical difficulties. They can't work because of pain. (VAW Provincial/Territorial sector)

Eight key respondents raised issues specific to girls and young women, both living on the streets and fleeing abusive relationships. Several of these mentioned the gap in eligibility for funding from the Provincial/Territorial Children's Services ministries.

There are increasing numbers of young women (17-19) who are probably the mandate of the Ministry for Children and Families but are living in the grey area. They are often coming into transition homes. (VAW sector)

There are five provinces/territories (Saskatchewan, Ontario, New Brunswick, Northwest Territories and one other) in which girls who are 16-17 are not guaranteed to get support from Children's Ministries and are not eligible for welfare until they are 18. There's a gap where they are just not guaranteed anything. There are also problems with girls not being able to get welfare. In some provinces the cut off for a "child" is 15, after which the girl is left without any help. Young women cannot sign leases, cannot get support. There are only a few youth safe houses (short term housing) in the [region]. All are co-ed; you might have a 14 year old girl in the same house as an 18 year old boy, which might not be safe. In safe houses, girls have to get permission from a parent to stay. The parents, out of embarrassment, may say she can come home, but she really can't because of safety or other issues, and then the safe house will not admit her, so she will have no place to stay. (Homeless & VAW sector)

I don't think there are enough support services for women throughout their lifespan in terms of housing. Girl homelessness isn't something that gets talked

about a lot. A lot of girls are homeless; most of them have experienced abuse. I don't think there are adequate resources for them. (Homeless sector)

There is some homelessness among teenage girls. Here, the age of majority is 19, but young women of 16-19 who want to leave their home have only the options to go into foster care or group home. Often, they want to be out on their own, but social services won't support them to be on their own. However, if they get pregnant they will be granted services and put up on their own. (Provincial/Territorial govt.)

In summary, the 77 key informants identified a number of issues that both complicate the lives of women dealing with homelessness or being abused, and interfere in their ability to access housing and other necessary services. The quotations provide compelling stories of women's lives at the margins of society. They identify ways in which the current Canadian social service network, although well-intended, fails its most vulnerable citizens.

Chapter Six: The Feasibility of a National Shelter Network

The central question for the current evaluation is whether developing a national network of shelters and transition houses to address issues for women and homelessness is feasible and sustainable. In considering the comments from the key informants presented in this chapter it is important to remember the context of the key respondents as presented in Chapter Three.

Although Canada has a network of over 500 VAW shelters, each individually funded provincially and each with a provincial transition house association, until very recently this has not translated into opportunities to consult nationally. Furthermore, not only is the newly formed Canadian Association of Women's Shelters (CAWS) consisting of the directors of the provincial transition house associations not yet funded, several of the provincial transition house associations have either lost their provincial funding or anticipate being at risk of losing their funding because of the uncertainty about the mandate of Status of Women Canada, their current funder. As such, their most immediate need is to find the resources to fund their own provincial and national networks. The idea of this opportunity to connect nationally around the broader issue of women and homelessness overlaps with their need to fund CAWS and the provincial transition house associations, but would bring new players and issues to the table beyond their current mandates.

Similarly, until recently, Canada's homeless shelters have not had a national organization. Few homeless shelters are specifically for women, and these are typically located in Canada's largest cities. While many homeless shelters have women residents, this has not necessarily translated into women specific programming or policies.

Several national networks deal with issues that are faced by women affected by homelessness or intimate partner violence. The National Working Group on Women and Housing is a national network currently funded by Status of Women Canada. A number of the provincial representatives from this group were interviewed for the current study. Again their expertise is primarily in the issues of housing for women, with less knowledge of violence against women.

The timing of this study is fortuitous since there has been movement in both the VAW sector and the homelessness sector to recognize the overlap in their populations and the common need of these women to find safe and affordable accommodation. Further, some national organizations, notably the YWCA Canada, have provided shelter and other services for both populations for decades. Five of the key respondents in the current study work in shelters for both populations and several of the provincial VAW transition house association directors have taken lead roles in their regions to tackle issues of housing.

The proposed national network of women's shelters overlaps with each of these constituents yet has a broader focus than any one existing organization. Considering the suggested network model that crosses the VAW and homelessness sectors, while retaining a focus on women and housing, constituted a paradigm shift for many of the key informants. A number of us, including the researchers, are steeped in either the VAW or the homeless sector. As such, imagining a joint initiative seemed initially foreign. However, discussing the issues in the interviews resulted in some key informants, who

originally saw few or no advantages in a network with this focus, shifting to see some possibilities. The experience highlighted in the following quote was echoed by a number of other participants:

When you called, I initially saw more problems than advantages. Having looked at the first several questions, I saw quickly the richness that such a network could provide. I initially saw it as a blurring of issues. The more I read the questions and let my mind wander about how I would answer them, the more I saw the feasibility. I initially didn't think it was a good idea to combine the two issues, and am still a little concerned. But if you draw together the people responsible for homelessness and shelters and transition homes, I think they will very quickly find a way to work together because there are so many common areas. (Provincial/territorial government)

This chapter provides comments from the key informants highlighting national networks with which they are currently involved, the general question of whether creating a national network is perceived as a good idea or not, reasons for both positions, the advantages of creating a network and concerns/barriers.

National Networks related to VAW and Homelessness for Women

All the key informants mentioned that they networked with other organizations, the majority of which were on the provincial or territorial level. However, a number of key informants were also members or partners with a variety of national networks. This section provides a table of the various national networks our key informants mentioned as significant in their work, and includes their comments regarding the importance of national networks.

The key informants stated that being part of national networks were significantly important to them.

We are on committees locally and nationally around food security, poverty, housing, violence, housing, youth and addictions, children and child protection. Women have to be talked about. We have to look at root causes of why people are in the situations they are in. The present government is cutting everything and that is going to have a large negative impact on people. They do not feel it's their responsibility to take care of the poorest of the poor and most of the time that is women. Networking is great. If you did the job I do, you would feel very isolated. It keeps us current on what's happening. It can help us because we have allies in government. It is important to be a voice and to strategize.

In the north, we are isolated from information and support, and that means the rest of Canada is isolated from the unique information we have here. Generally in Canada, when research is done or statistics are gathered, the northern part of Canada is left out. We found that if we didn't develop strong national networks we would continue to be excluded. We work on reducing oppression and discrimination. Because our client population is largely Aboriginal, we are particularly concerned about racism and the ongoing failure of federal, provincial and territorial governments to recognize and address colonization.

The following table lists in alphabetical order the national organizations that the key informants identified as significant in their work.

National Organizations
Canadian Association of Food Banks/ Association canadienne des banques alimentaires (CAFB/ACBA)
Canadian Association of Women's Shelters (CAWS)
Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA)
Canadian Outcomes Research Institute (CORI)
Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women/ Institute canadien de recherché sur les femmes (CRIAW/ICREF)
Coalition for Women's Equality (CWE-CFE)
Family Violence Initiative
Feminist Alliance for International Action/ L'alliance canadienne féministe pour l'action internationale (FAFIA/AFAI)
GROOTS National and International (Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood)
National Aboriginal and Homelessness Initiative
National Action Committee on the Status of Women
National Anti-Poverty Organization of Canada/ Organisation nationale anti-pauvreté (NAPO-ONAP)
National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence
National Association of Friendship Centres
National Association of Women and the Law
National Coalition on Housing and Homelessness
National Council of Welfare/ Conseil national du bien-être social
National Housing and Homelessness Network (NHHN)
National Working Group on Women and Housing in Canada (NWG)
Native Women's Association of Canada
Poverty Law Network
PovNet
Salvation Army (SA)
Shelternet
YWCA Canada

Overall, the key informants perceived the national networks with which they worked as effective.

The networks we've been involved in are quite effective because they have helped raise awareness.

The major goal of networks is to promote the well-being of all Canadians. That translates into helping those that are oppressed and not being treated equally. Of course, this includes women and Aboriginal women. These networks make for a better, richer society and are very effective.

How effective are the networks we're involved in? We bring attention to women's issues. We get media attention. We know what's going on in different parts of the

country as a result of being part of those networks. On a regular basis we meet with and strategize with politicians to advance issues that are pertinent to women.

National networks can be pretty effective at getting their messages out, getting the ear of government. They don't do local, just policy, higher level at the federal or provincial levels. Have they changed policy in Canada? No. Have they forced the hand of government? Sometimes.

However, as indicated in the quote below, respondents also identified challenges with networking.

Some networks are more effective than others. Each has a place and a role. A lot of the member agencies say, for example, "We don't have a problem, we house Aboriginal people." But I say, "It's not working because we have high numbers of Aboriginal people who are homeless. It doesn't fit." Just because you say it's okay, doesn't mean it fits for Aboriginal people. There needs to be more Aboriginal people, women on boards in the housing sector, on the national networks, so what's being built fits for us. Even though they say they are inclusive, they're not. That is my frustration. There needs to be more Aboriginals and women sitting on some of these networks to ensure that the decisions fit.

Advantages of a National Network of Women's Shelters

In general, the key informants from both the shelter and homelessness sectors and governments supported the idea of creating a national network. Of 72 interviewees, 56 or 78% were generally positive about the feasibility of a national network. Ten saw no advantages or could not conceive of what such a network would do and a further six were originally sceptical but later acknowledged some possible benefits. Nevertheless, even respondents who were intrigued with the concept provided considerable detail about the advantages and disadvantages of structuring a national network around this issue.

Sixty-two key informants commented on the general advantages of creating a national network (24 of 27 from the VAW sector, 15 of 17 from the homeless sector, 4 of 5 from the VAW & Homeless sector, 12 of 14 VAW Provincial/territorial government reps, 5 of 6 Housing Provincial/territorial government reps, 2 Federal government reps). The key respondents noted four major advantages: 1) sharing information and resources that could lead to better practices, 2) that a national network would have greater voice and credibility when raising the issues of women and housing, 3) informing policy and 4) sharing data and conducting research. The following quotes address the first two advantages:

It will help create a national movement and momentum to address issues that we know are occurring coast to coast. It is beyond time that we have a national network to identify critical and emerging issues impacting women's lives in these areas. It allows us to share best practices, come up with tangible workable solutions, communicate with federal government so we have a federal response to these issues. The network can respond and be accountable not only locally, regionally and nationally. It would be helpful to understand what is happening regionally across the country and how funding is different. Is one region a best practice approach over another? It allows regions to share what's happening and

maybe one regional government can learn from another through the national group. (VAW sector)

Sharing information with respect to best practices was the most commonly noted advantage, mentioned by 48 key informants across all sectors:

A national shelter network can strengthen the entire shelter network, locally, provincially/territorially, and nationally. One of the main advantages is that best practices and capacity building can be shared. (VAW sector)

A sharing of information, best practices, research, an opportunity for organizations to not work in isolation. (VAW sector)

It would be a great way for shelters to get support from each other, share best practices, apply political pressure, to increase funding for existing services and create new services. Even if this network was solely for support it would be an advantage because working in a shelter can be so frustrating and lonely. (VAW Provincial/territorial government)

Especially for the north it would be nice because we are very isolated up here. We're so busy working on our own issues it's hard to find breathing space to connect with others in the country. (VAW Provincial/territorial government)

A national network of housing resources would have the advantage of making known initiatives everywhere. A Canadian network would be useful to get out of the analysis that links women's homelessness to individual paths; either it is related to domestic violence or homelessness. To bring the various networks which already exist to contact each other and to create working ties. (Homeless sector)

It is a good idea from a couple of perspectives. Number one for me is the ability to share effective practices, to take a look at the business of abused women shelters and shelter life. It is hard to step back and take a look at what really works and what other people have had success with. A national network will give people the opportunity to do that. That's the biggest thing for me, the ability to share effective practises. That is a win for everybody: service providers, funders, and most of all, the families that we serve. I think it gives people the opportunity to look at the world from a broader place. (VAW Provincial/territorial govt.)

One of the things that needs to happen with the NGO's, is people need to work more with best practices, and therapeutic responses, with the goal of helping people to become more independent. A national network could provide more training and support to staff. (Homeless Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Also commonly noted was the advantage of giving a national voice to issues of women's housing, poverty and abuse (20 respondents).

If you have a national network, it helps us to recognize the problem more as a national problem, rather than one that municipalities struggle to deal with. (Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Strength in numbers is really important. We can talk with a voice. We can have different opinions, but we are also united in what the issues are: for example, that

there needs to be a national housing strategy, that women from Newfoundland to Victoria all experience housing as an issue. Or we can advocate that for all women across Canada, there is an issue that women are being assaulted after they have left their partners. I can see this body doing a lot of advocacy on a national level. We would have so many more numbers behind than provincially. When it's provincial, people are fighting for their own domain. This would put it on another level. I'm very excited about it. I think it's great. (VAW sector)

I do see some advantages. Coming from the national organization with a feminist analysis, I do think that a national network of women's shelters should include an analysis of women's homelessness that is broader than just woman abuse such as the lack of affordable housing and poverty. The advantage is a stronger voice around gender and housing issues. (Homeless sector)

It would give shelters a larger voice and maybe get our federal government to acknowledge that this is a problem in Canada. If we look at it nationally rather than provincially we are more likely to see changes in federal policy. Hopefully, with changes in federal policy, we will be able to address issues of homelessness and poverty in our nation. It is important that Canada take this seriously. If governments realized that services at front end mean fewer services at the back end, a country of children living in poverty and violence is not the answer. (VAW sector)

It is long overdue. I think it will help create a national movement and momentum to address issues that we know are occurring coast to coast. I think it is beyond time that we have a national network to identify critical and emerging issues impacting women's lives in these areas. (VAW sector)

The second most mentioned advantage of creating a national network was the ability to inform policy, lobby and advocate. Utilizing each other's expertise and information sharing would form the basis for informing policy and lobbying on behalf of women, a point raised by 26 key informants from the VAW and homeless sectors.

A national network would be very helpful in quantifying what is available in all the provinces and allow us to easily compare. That could help different groups in different provinces advocate for more appropriate housing in their areas. (Homeless sector)

A national network can also influence public policy. Those that are strong in advocacy can also help others learn how to influence public policy. A national shelter network can potentially influence how funding is done across the country. Some provinces have much better funding programs than others. With a national network there is more scope for influencing that. (VAW sector)

A network could raise issues. A national shelter network could advocate for permanent housing. People don't succeed in shelters; they aren't supposed to succeed in shelter. It's just a bed. We could advocate for more community based services. We need people connected with these issues to unite and be powerful. The power needs to be equal across the board. And not just in one person. You

need a community. One of the ways to do that is to have members meet regularly to talk about the issues in their community. (Homeless sector)

If there were nationally things that needed to change that it would be an opportunity for a coalition of safe houses to get together to argue for a change in policy or whatever was needed. I am sure that there are similar issues happening in other provinces. This needs to be more like an actual tool for making changes, and it needs to be used to make the homelessness of women and girls more visible in public policy. (VAW & Homeless sector)

Several of the government representatives also mentioned advocacy and influencing policy, seeing the potential in a national network.

I would hate to see this become just an advocacy organization that talks about we never have enough. I understand the challenges and I don't push those to the side. But I also know that moving forward is in the best interests of the people that we serve, so I would like to see a real positive spin on it in terms of we've got very intelligent, very committed people out there across the country. We need to build on that, create learning organizations versus straight advocacy organizations. Advocacy is important and I know as a government person, they are always suspect when you talk about that. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

It would be a great way for shelters to apply political pressure, to increase funding for existing services and create new services. The only way a network would build that capacity is if it had strong leadership. I do see the potential for this being only support group, which would mean there might not be movement forward but would be valuable for the people involved in it. But, with the right people and the right direction, I could see information sharing and finding common ground that could lead to shelters getting together to publicly lobby governments and develop action plans. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

The ability to inform policy occurs at multiple levels, but you have to ensure that informing policy is a responsibility of the organization. Informing policy is hard work, and it's more than advocacy. Most important component of informing policy is good research or evidence-based analysis. (Provincial/Territorial govt.)

I would say (a national network) would be advantageous: 1) it's good because it allows for government to hear the needs, and how things are working across the country. 2) It does allow dialogue to improve policy, to share information, best practices, to bring attention to the issues. There may also be an advocacy role. There could be a benefit to have a research agenda, and to support policy development. (Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Data collection and developing relevant research were mentioned by seven respondents:

A national network will also give people the opportunity to get more research on the ground out there. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

The advantages I see are that it is a way to talk across the country and a way to learn from each other about the good things that are happening and the challenges. A national network can give the needed statistics and stories. (VAW & homeless sector)

I can see the national network could be more on the research end. (VAW sector)

Benefits of a National Network to One's Organizations

A question that somewhat overlaps with whether the key informants perceived advantages to creating a national network of women's shelters and transition houses is whether there are benefits to their own organizations. Their responses provide more contextual information with respect to whether or not they could directly benefit from such an affiliation.

The representatives from the homeless (9 of 17) and VAW sectors (20 of 27 key informants) and four of the five representatives that crossed homelessness and VAW primarily reported that they would, indeed, derive benefits. The central advantage was the opportunity to share best practices and build capacity, especially in the context that they currently have few opportunities to do so either provincially or nationally.

In my work, a national shelter network gives us a vehicle to convey some of the issues we are seeing locally to a national group. We may be able to affect policy at provincial and national levels that we wouldn't have had the ability to access on our own. A national group can address systemic issues. Most of us are aware of the systemic issue, but as a local group it is very challenging to try to address them effectively. (Homeless sector)

Huge benefits. Primarily because we have little ability to see the future, and to see trends. It would be really important for us to know where we need to position ourselves in the future. i.e. what happens to homeless seniors? We're an aging population - we need to position ourselves to respond to emerging issues. These discussions need to happen on a national level. (VAW & Homeless sector)

It's always good to partner with other organizations. Partnerships can be seen as not only, what is in it for me, but also what can we provide to other organizations. Quite often we're talking about individuals that are transient, and may travel across the country using the shelter network. Better communication, both to the services being provided for women in the shelter system, but also to the community about those services being offered. Access to funding spreads a lot quicker through a network, to be able to support the various ministries and shelters in the community. Another advantage is support for the individual shelter. It gives a stronger voice to the issues connected to abused or homeless women. (Homeless sector)

It could benefit our organization on a national level by strengthening our voice around national policy issues like divorce, immigration, the Indian Act. It could strengthen our voice on other pieces of national legislation policy: poverty, housing policy or lack thereof, a national child care program, those kinds of things. It would be beneficial for abused women to have a national voice. But for our organization it would be a lot of work. (VAW sector)

There might be a way this network and ours could work very collaboratively. We already have the advocacy piece, although for how much longer we're going to be able to do that is questionable, given our funder. We are a small group. If we could incorporate the voices of women's shelters across the country both

homeless and shelters for abused women, it would be a very strong voice covering off on what we see as interrelated voices. (Homeless sector)

For our agency, I think the opportunity to network and learn from workers across the country - not only just for me as a director, but for my staff. (VAW sector)

(My organization) would gain a lot by knowing what is going on in the rest of Canada. We feel somewhat isolated from others provinces mostly because of the language barrier. (VAW sector)

In contrast, the provincial/territorial governmental representatives (14 respondents) perceived fewer direct benefits to their departments from the creation of a national network, although several noted the advantages to the shelters and provincial shelter associations. Three saw no benefits:

I don't know how it would benefit us, because we don't build shelters ourselves. It doesn't have huge implications or benefits to us, from a provincial perspective. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

There wouldn't be any advantages for us; on the contrary it may put even more pressure in us. We already have pressure from some groups that politicize housing problems in (my province). (Housing Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Others saw advantages even if the government itself did not directly benefit.

It would provide us with information that might be helpful in looking at services and policies. If it benefits the organizations we fund, that's always a good thing. Directly benefiting us? No. We don't fund the provincial association. While the services are similar in terms of transition houses across the country, they're funded and managed in different ways from province to province. Do I think there should be a higher profile across the country for family violence? Absolutely! (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

The only benefits would be in the context if the shelters are able to be involved in effective practise, or to learn about what effective practise looks like, to be able to share with others, to share research, looking at things that can make their life easier from their provincial association's perspectives. That is a win for everybody. We are interested in high quality service for abused women and abused women with children. So that would be the indirect benefit to us. In terms of would we pull anything specific from the network for our own benefit? Probably not. It would be more in the context of supporting those agencies doing contractual work with us. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

I would see the benefits more for the shelters themselves. I guess we would benefit because the shelters would benefit. (Housing Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Nevertheless, some provincial/territorial respondents identified ways that the network could benefit their departments.

We connect with our counterparts for reality checks now, but this would make it easier to do. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Absolutely. I come from a place of community development. Any time we can learn from one another, it produces a better outcome. It also would be acknowledging expertise within the community. I think traditionally we may have government sectors and community sectors that are going on parallel tracks. When we work together, we enhance our expertise. We're increasing exponentially our opportunities to work towards a common goal. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

In-service training for shelter workers that we could access, and then deliver for our own people, would be helpful. We have nothing to lose and everything to gain at this point. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

In summary, the majority of key respondents that answered this question saw benefits for their particular organizations, whether local, provincial, national or governmental.

Reasons for Not Supporting a National Network

Ten individuals saw no advantages to a national network (1 of 27 from the VAW sector, 2 of 17 from the homeless sector, 1 of 5 from the VAW and Homeless sector, 3 of 14 provincial/territorial VAW representatives and 3 of the 7 provincial government housing sector).

Six others started out with negative perspectives but shifted to seeing at least some advantages (2 of 27 from the VAW sector, 1 of 5 from the Homeless and VAW sector, 1 of 14 provincial government representatives and 2 of 7 provincial government/territorial representatives). Interestingly, of the 16 that were unenthusiastic about the national network, over half (9 or 56%) were provincial/territorial government representatives. Details about what aspects these and other respondents were raised as concerns are presented in this and the next section.

As mentioned, one-fifth of the respondents (16 of 73 respondents or 22%) were sceptical that such an organization would be useful, however four of these (all provincial government/territorial representatives) simply found it difficult to conceptualize what such a network would do. The following quotes document the major questions raised by the key respondents that did not consider the proposed national shelter network to be workable:

I just don't see what a national network could accomplish. When I see the word "network," I think historically of an underground railroad-we're helping people. But "network" in a modern context is just people sitting around spouting philosophy and writing position papers. We've got enough of that already. My bottom line is: what will it accomplish or will it just add to frustration, just one more layer. Where is the action? A national network is expensive, I would much rather see that money go into direct service. (VAW & Homeless sector)

I honestly don't see it as an effective tool. While I do see it around the issue of violence against women, there are different challenges. In terms of governance, I don't know how you could create semblance of equality at the table. Certainly those provinces with the most shelters and most resources will be more likely to be listened to by the politicians. (VAW sector)

I've worked for a long time at the federal level and I don't believe in national structures or networks anymore. I think we'd better work on integrating our local networks and structures and give ourselves the means to share information and communicate between workers and resources here in [province]. There are already many existing structures and networks. Those require an important amount of energy, so where will the workers find the strength to feed such a network, especially since there is an important work to do at the local level? (VAW & homeless sector)

I don't know how it would benefit us. I'm still struggling on what the network would do, perhaps some consistency in standards. If someone heard the feds are considering a national network, people might say why don't you just build more affordable housing? (VAW Provincial/territorial government)

We don't see any advantages in a network of resources that would include domestic violence shelters, transition housing, women and men homelessness shelters. Regarding homelessness shelters that's different. There is no network for homeless women resources. The two problems are so different it's difficult to think that a network including all resources would be pertinent. (Homeless sector)

Concerns About a National Network

Although generally supportive of creating a national network, a number of key respondents noted concerns about doing so. The major question is whether the disadvantages of creating a national association that combines both the populations of homeless women and women abused by partners, outweigh the advantages, even in the context of acknowledging the overlap in these populations.

Seventeen key informants queried the wisdom of and/or identified challenges in creating a network addressing both populations (8 of 27 VAW sector representatives, 2 of 17 from the homeless sector, 2 of 5 from the VAW & homeless sector, 5 of 14 government reps: 4 from the VAW sector and 1 from housing). The following are quotes from representatives from the VAW sector:

Homeless shelters and women's shelters are like apples and oranges. All women's shelters are dealing with the same issue. Homeless shelters are for both men and women, and it's a broader issue. In some ways, we're almost a subset of homelessness. My fear would be that to form an alliance of the two bodies on a national basis, is that we would be lost. I wouldn't want to see us assume a position where the women's shelters are lost. You also don't want to cry for attention when the homelessness issue is very important to deal with. I want to be heard, but don't want to drown out the voice of the homelessness lobby. I think we should have two different national networks - one for homelessness and one for violence against women. (VAW sector)

You have two separate models of program delivery. Shelters have worked hard to provide specialized services, doing everything from public education around family violence, woman abuse; the implications of exposure on children. They are working with the police in terms of responses to domestic violence; with social assistance agencies. Homelessness would be a completely different focus. It is one

issue that abused women have to contend with, but there are many other issues that shelter workers have to address. (VAW sector)

Separating VAW shelters and homeless shelters for women on some levels is an artificial divide. But women who experience chronic homelessness have specific needs that are different. The response has to be based on what we know the needs to be in each population. I'm not saying that we can't do the two together. It's a matter of understanding the women's needs and gearing support to those needs. The challenge is that whole piece of homelessness versus violence against women. Until funding formulas are changed and the responsibility of government is changed, regions will continue with a divide between homelessness and VAW. Maybe we need to look at how it is working in shelters that mix the two populations and those where it is not mixed. What are the issues? What are women's presenting concerns in both areas? What is the best way to provide those services? I think we need more research. I don't think we've come to any workable decision if it should be combined or separate. (VAW sector)

Our interest is domestic violence. If a network has a very wide membership, including homelessness resources and transition houses, we would really have to be sure our interest is met. If our only common link is housing, that is not our central interest. Domestic violence is our interest; housing is for us, only a means to help women. (VAW sector)

Several key informants from the VAW sector questioned that because homeless shelters also provide services for men, how the proposed national network would retain a focus on women.

I would prefer the national shelter network solely focused on violence against women. We could lose this equality piece if we combine with homelessness coalition because homelessness also involves men. The only advantage to having both combined is numbers. If you organize the numbers you can advocate on a stronger plane. However the negative around that is how the issue of violence against women would be watered down by a coalition combining the two. I would prefer that the network focus on violence against women. (VAW sector)

My board was clear that they would not support a national shelter association that combined VAW and generic homeless agencies. There are lots of homeless agencies that have no gender analysis. We couldn't be part of an association working on women's homelessness and abuse when some of the members don't understand the issue or have a gender analysis. (VAW sector)

One concern from the violence against women shelter sector is that the provincial/territorial shelter associations recently formed a Canadian association, the Canadian Association of Women's Shelters (CAWS) in response to many years of concern that there was no venue for VAW shelters to discuss their mutual issues and best practices. Approximately a year ago, these representatives declared themselves to be an association, however to date they have no funding to assist in their activities. Several key informants queried how creating a new association with a broader focus on women and homelessness could affect CAWS.

Women across this country have been able to put together a national network unofficially at this point. We have a national network (CAWS) and using it to its capacity. For that capacity to increase, and for it to continue, we need supports.

Notably, however, two representatives from the homeless sector were concerned about the currently proposed network focusing solely on violence against women. They argued for combining the two constituencies.

One of the real dilemmas is combining the VAW shelters and the shelters working with homeless women. I don't know if it's an issue across Canada, but there really is quite a disconnect in [province/territory] between the two groups of shelters. They are funded differently. Typically, VAW shelters get more money, more staffing. There is almost a kind of class difference in that VAW shelters don't seem very interested in taking women who may have mental health issues, women who are homeless but experiencing violence on the street. So it would be really good to have a network that included both because it is tempting to look at domestic violence in isolation and to put supports in place, but it is very related to child sexual abuse and physical abuse. Women on the street are facing violence much more. To look at that whole continuum of violence would be really important. That doesn't happen in any larger picture way. (Homeless sector)

It would be unfortunate if a network started and it was just for shelters for abused women. The VAW sector is somewhat cordoned off from the homeless women's sector and from the broader anti-poverty women's housing sector. I think it would be great if we could strengthen that by working collaboratively with a new network. (Homeless sector)

The government representatives that spoke to whether a national network should combine the issues of abuse and homelessness raised similar concerns:

I would separate the issues. There are 500 shelters for abused women across the country, they are numerous and large enough to stand on their own as a distinct and separate network. If we're talking about creating a network, there are so many distinctive features to women's shelter versus homeless shelters. I would hope we would be talking primarily about shelters for abused women. There would be disadvantages if it were lumped in with a broader network that included homeless shelters. I vote in favour of a stand-alone network. (VAW Government)

There are ties between VAW and homelessness, but the approach used would be very different. The needs and sets of circumstances are very different. If you throw kids into the mix, you have a whole other set of circumstances. There's disadvantages to separating approaches between homeless men and women, because the issues they face are pretty much the same. I'd worry about developing a separate policy approach between men and women. However, you very much have a separate approach when you're talking about family violence. You've also got kids, husbands, when you're dealing with VAW. (Housing Provincial/Territorial govt.)

An entirely different suggestion was to create a non-gendered national shelter association with sub-specializations for men's and women's issues

I'd far rather see a national shelter network that brings all of the shelters together and that has subfocus areas for men, women, etc. I would not want to see separate organizations for each population. The shelter system is so under-resourced across the country; to put resources into two or three national coalitions does not make sense to me. (Provincial/territorial govt. Housing)

To summarize, almost three quarters of the key informants supported the creation of a national network of women's shelters that addresses issues of both homelessness and violence against women, identifying a number of advantages to the creation of a network focused on women's abuse and homelessness. Notably, over half of the sixteen individuals who saw no or only minor advantages were government representatives. Few of the VAW and homeless sector representatives were rigidly opposed to the concept.

However, even those that were inclined toward supporting the national network identified some inherent difficulties including the fact that the VAW sector and homelessness sector are structured and funded very differently. Although there are overlaps in their issues there are also important differences. The discussion about these similarities and differences could, however, move forward the discourse about how to best support these women more holistically. This discussion would be an important first focus in any meetings to move the national network of women's shelters forward.

Chapter Seven: Structuring a National Network

If a national network of women's shelters were created, what would be its structure and mandate? How would it be funded and who would be members? Would the network collect and share data and how would it utilize technology? This chapter presents the key informants' ideas about answers to these questions. In each section, the challenges about doing so are highlighted.

It is important to clarify that the issues in this chapter represent the initial thinking of a number of key stakeholders who were interviewed individually and some of whom might become members of a national network. Each of these considerations would need to be negotiated by the members as a whole if this initiative moves forward. The final configuration could look quite different from what is described here.

Apart from the issue of mixing representatives from the VAW and homeless sectors identified in the previous chapter, the following quotes clarify the challenges of creating a network of national scope.

National organizations are difficult. There is everything from time differences, the cost of networking nationally, the cost of translation. There's also the challenge of how to include First Nation and Aboriginal women. The only way we can address these issues is through dialogue and face to face discussions. You have to take it in small steps; you can't wave a wand and say "here, we have a national organization." It takes time and goodwill and working together and talking things out, some small successes. Resources would be a big challenge. (VAW sector)

Challenges to form a network of women's shelter? It's a huge country. (VAW sector)

Is there enough of a payoff with all the work to be done, the commitment people have to make in their time? From my involvement with a national organization, I can see how hard it is to get us together on an annual basis. It's a challenge. I'm very aware that the organizations I have the strongest and best working relationships with are those that I meet with more often. Colleagues in BC, Newfoundland, just aren't as strong. Where does the money come from that allows groups the luxury of going and travelling and spending time with each other? (VAW sector)

The Governance of a National Network

A central initial question is what would be the mandate of a national network of women's shelters and transition houses? Although the mandate is somewhat implicit in its name, more refinement would be necessary if the initiative moves forward. Several key informants raised important questions about the mandate.

One of the challenges will be determining the mandate of the national network. Is it service? Is it to support shelters in their service provision? Is it to be an advocacy or lobbying group, which no one will fund? I think both are important. That's why I like the idea of a model that has two funding streams: one to support service, one to support advocacy and lobbying. But I think that can be another challenge in creating a national network because different organizations, the two sectors, may have different opinions what the priorities should be. Setting up a

structure: how it will be governed and managed may be a challenge, but could be sorted out. (VAW sector)

It's already difficult at a local level to bring together distinct networks. Their organization culture and approaches are somewhat different. Some work on harm reduction and others have a more classical approach on specific problems, and some work on rights protection. There are a lot of different practices and some have conflicting interests. It's not as much as to gather resources and services into a national network and to develop practice norms, than to have access to common and strategic information to able them to carry on political actions. So it all depends on the goals that justify putting up such a network. If it's mostly to give independent community resources the chance to share information, that's one thing, but if it's an opportunity for institutional resources to exchange on best practices, it's a very different proposition. There are already many existing structures and networks that I'm afraid that groups will lose themselves in structures and organizations. (Homeless sector)

If it went forward and was funded, it would need to be clear about why they were doing it. Issues like how do you work with provincial organizations would have to be addressed or there will be resistance. (Housing Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Is it going to be driven by the non-profit sector? One of the challenges at the grass roots level, is they are focused on doing the work. They don't have a lot of extra resources to devote to policy development. It raises a question about how it will be resourced, who will be members, who will be represented on the board. We need to keep clear what the purpose of the network is. Keep the outcome and results at the top of your mind, because otherwise people will question the benefit of the network. (Housing Government rep.)

Challenges—it's always a balance between national and local autonomy. There is always a dynamic tension there. It would be important to have clear terms of reference, clear objectives about what this is supposed to be and accomplish. An organization that is forward thinking and forward moving. Keeping it client focused and on best practices. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

It's important that the network takes the time to be clear about what we want to do and to really critique all the reasons for being. It's important to have a powerful national goal. (VAW sector)

A number of the VAW and homeless sector representatives suggested possible mandates.

The value of the national network depends on the goal. If the goal of a national network is to work on women's equality rights on behalf of women who experience violence and why women's equality is so important to ending that in their lives then that would be a valuable addition to the other national women's groups. We'd have a strong voice. (VAW sector)

Our members are open to the fact that mixed (for men and women) shelters could be members of such a national network, as long as it is to specifically meet the women's needs and to consider their own reality. So, the network's mission should be to single out or emphasize women's reality within every issue. The

mixed organizations' goal should be to deepen their understanding of homeless women's specific experiences. They also should commit themselves to better their services to answer women's own needs. (VAW sector)

Another challenge is finding meaningful reasons to come together. Developing goals and objectives for the organization that would merit people taking the time to actually get involved. They need to feel they're achieving something. In the beginning information exchange is probably enough but over time they will be looking for more. A national policy on homelessness maybe something they would work towards. (Government representative)

We need to look at a wide social planning system to make everyone safe. It will depend on political will and commitment of those at the table. And we need to see changes happen across the country. In order to engage marginalized voices we have to make it real for them, otherwise they may need and request and make their own (e.g. First Nations, immigrant, mental health population). Instead of separate, we need to be looking at bigger picture of homelessness together and not in a token way. (VAW sector)

Another question raised by several key informants is what form should the “network” take?

Governance implies a legal entity; we might do better as a coalition. Then we could share/take turns being the legal entity for grants as needed. (VAW sector)

From my experience with trying to create a national network and the funding issues, we decided to be an umbrella of umbrella organizations. (Homeless sector)

I'm more inclined to go to coalitions than establishing a full-blown separate organization. It should also be grassroots run. (VAW sector)

I don't know how you'd do it except by having parallel networks with someone focusing on meeting the needs of the homelessness sector and someone focusing on the VAW sector, like program managers for each sector. (VAW sector)

Membership in a National Network

Forty-six key informants answered a question with respect to who should become members of such a national network (22 of 27 from the VAW sector; 13 of 17 homeless sector; 3 of 5 from the joint VAW & homeless sector; 8 government representatives). As clarified by several respondents, membership should depend on the mandate of the organization.

I think all VAW transition houses in Canada and their associations and any other groups that house women, women shelters (homeless), YWCA etc. It depends on the mandate. I think the more open we are, the more opportunities we have to make it work. (VAW sector)

A good starting point is the purpose of the network and what you'd like to accomplish. If it's about sheltering, emergency or transition houses, you should probably go to them. If there is a coalition of transition houses go to them and find the best representative from there. I'd make sure I had somebody

representing emergency (homeless) shelters and probably someone from the provincial government in the housing branch that would be able to speak to housing stock, availability of subsidized housing and the health of the non-profit sector and what are some of the issues in housing. Those would be good choices to start with. (Provincial territorial government)

Who should be members depends on what the sector feels is needed. If advocacy, then you'd want a broader membership. If what you need is really about the day to day work within VAW and homeless shelters and a network could assist with that, then you'd want more narrow membership. Your membership is all people who are over worked and under paid. Unless they can see the benefits of it, they're not going to have a lot of energy for it. They won't see the benefits of the network right away because you're just establishing yourself. They need to see the medium and longer term benefits of establishing a network. (Homeless sector)

In addition to the need to create a mandate defining membership, the complexity of who, more specifically, should be involved is exemplified by the following quotations. One essential question is how broad the membership should be in order to keep on task.

Violence against women. Should it be individuals or organizations or associations? That's tough. If you go with associations, you have one person speaking for an entire province. On a national level, not every shelter in the province belongs to my association, so I can't represent them all. Or you can say every shelter should be a member. If it's going to be a national network that talks about homeless and abused WOMEN, but only women's agencies. There are lots of homeless agencies that have no gender analysis. The network has to be inclusive, if women aren't at the table, then we can't suggest anything that will help women. The network must have Aboriginal women, women of colour at the table. I hope there would also be a place for survivors at the table. (VAW sector)

A national network should gather all those that intervene in shelters or housing resources. There could be different levels of affiliation. The members who intervene directly with the various clienteles have different concerns when it comes to a national network. Both levels of government should be part, as well as women's groups so that their voices are heard. (Homeless sector)

The reality now is that services involving violence against women and homelessness are separate. There could be good reasons for that. I can appreciate when women's shelters are careful about who they take in because they want to protect children. Mixing people is not always the best way to proceed. However, in a national network, both groups should be at the table, the abused women's network, homeless women and women who have been abused by multiple partners should all be there. All three clusters should be at the table, along with mental health and addictions too. (VAW & homeless sector)

Reps from Transition Houses and homeless shelters. Also the players in the community involved in homelessness from all levels i.e. municipal, provincial, federal, should be involved. The Aboriginal, homeless, addictions shelters would all be key people to be involved. (VAW sector)

The most common response across all key informants was that the group should have representation from VAW shelters, homeless shelters with programs for women and other groups group with specialized knowledge of these issues such as the National Working Group on Women and Housing and Shelternet (15 respondents).

Organizations that currently exist: the VAW provincial associations, other national organizations with similar concerns. (VAW sector)

Who should represent each sector differed. From the VAW sector, five suggested that the provincial associations of transition houses for abused women (essentially the members of CAWS) are the most logical to speak for the issues of abused women.

To start, I would say each of the provincial VAW organizations. (VAW sector)

Across the entire group of key informants, ten suggested that individual shelters be included, perhaps electing representatives from among the shelters in each province. One reason for this is that not all shelters are members of their provincial transition house associations:

We aren't a member of any of the provincial networks but we could be a member of the national association. We should have a role even if it's just being a member. (VAW sector)

Each province should have representatives but they should reflect the different types of shelters, which means you might need more than one representative per region. All transition houses (first, second and third stage) and all shelters. (VAW sector)

Homeless shelters that work with women should be members. If the homelessness shelters have provincial associations, those associations should be part of the network. (VAW & homeless sector)

Shelters that primarily serve women who are homeless should be members and/or shelters serving women leaving violent partners. Homeless shelters that agree to a particular set of principles or philosophy should be members. Shelters that are willing to share information should be members and be willing to share statistics. (Homeless sector)

Seven mentioned that government representatives should probably be at the table, although several specified that they not take the lead.

I think government should be involved too. They need to be sitting there offering support and gaining some understanding of what is going on. It's appropriate to have government because they are sitting with the people that they are serving. (Homeless sector)

I imagine provincial funders would want to be there, and probably should have representation. (VAW sector)

(The federal government?) If they are funding it, they have the right to be at the table. (VAW sector)

However, two informants specified that government should not be involved.

Provincial governments shouldn't be part of it. The presence of government representatives also depends on the national network's mission. (VAW sector)

I don't want government there. (Homeless sector)

In addition to organizations that address women and housing and abuse, the key informants mentioned other constituencies including sexual assault centres, the sexually exploited women sector, family resource centres, researchers and advocates, and other national groups such as the National Working Group on Women and Housing, and National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence.

Others mentioned that women survivors should have a voice.

There should be the diversity of women. I would want to have young lesbians there that have been on the street, seniors and different populations. (VAW sector)

There should be a mechanism for women who use shelters and transition houses to have a voice there, but I'm not sure how to achieve that. (VAW sector)

Funding a National Network

Of all of the potential challenges identified in creating a national network of women's shelters, funding was not only mentioned most frequently but was seen by a number of the key informants as the most significant challenge.

Funding would be the biggest challenge. If there's commitment to put together a national shelter network, I would like to see the network get the funding that it needs that would allow it to be an effective organization. (Homeless sector)

There is the cost of networking nationally, the cost of translation. How the network could be funded is difficult because everyone is fighting for their own survival. (VAW sector)

I actually don't see it being funded. Funding for a stronger voice for disadvantaged women? It sounds like advocacy to me, that we might be suggesting there is in fact no equality. I honestly don't see a way, unless legislation and policies change again, that it will be funded at all. Certainly the provincial associations and individual shelters won't have the resources to fund such a network. (VAW sector)

Resources will be a challenge. We're a national organization and resources are what has prevented us from having moved along more quickly. The time is right for a national network, and the biggest challenge is resources. (VAW sector)

The biggest one would be money. Even in informal networks there are problems because conference calls cost money. You can certainly email back and forth, but you do not get the same level of buy-in on something like that. Coordinating something and being able to fund it is huge. (VAW sector)

With respect to the activities that would require funding, the key informants mentioned needing staff, an office, and the importance of travel for at least some face to face meetings of both the entire network and the executive board.

With respect to staffing, twelve key informants highlighted the need for assistance, whether part or full-time.

In terms of governance, it's important to have a staff person. From working in a national organization, I think I can say that it is important to have a person who understands the federal system not only for the financial reporting, but also for the project management of things. (VAW sector)

It's critical (to have) one paid staff at least, for this to work. Someone who coordinates however the network is going to connect whether it's teleconference or face to face; someone who follows up on decisions that are made. Not necessarily that they do that work but if somebody from Saint John and somebody from Ottawa have agreed to take on a task, there has to be a paid person to follow up and say "How is that going?" (Homeless sector)

Maybe we could have a part-time person that takes the minutes, calls the meetings, organizes, hounds people for information. (VAW sector)

The structure and staffing is important. It can't be people just volunteering their time. It should have a board and be staffed appropriately so that they can conduct the work that is necessary to do all those pieces. That helps ensure effectiveness. (VAW sector)

Several individuals coupled the need for staff with the need for an office, even noting the advantage of creating an office in Ottawa.

The network needs a national base, it will need a staff person, or a few staff people, who can have that information and can speak out publicly. I think that would be hugely helpful because there are so few groups that have a national perspective on women. If you had an information coordinator, and someone to coordinate research would be really good as well as an office administrator. (Homeless sector)

I'd like to see us have an office and a staff person in Ottawa. (VAW sector)

Having face-to-face meetings of the network members was mentioned as a necessity by thirteen key informants, albeit one that entails considerable costs.

I'm not opposed to technology but don't think it's the most effective way to work. We have to know each other. What's worked best for me on national ones is when we were brought together in think tanks. People who are passionate about the topic can get together, and then we can talk via conference calls or emails. (VAW sector)

Preferably there would be core funding, i.e. long term and multi year funding. Multi faceted program funding. Also (there) has to be money to ensure membership organizations can take part and communicate. There will be a strong demand for face to face meetings, so a yearly face to face meeting would be needed. (Provincial/Territorial govt.)

It would also be important to come together once a year to come together to talk about common strategies and common plans and how we can move forward and how we can be really reflective in the work that we do. (VAW sector)

Eight key informants mentioned the benefits of meeting together in a conference format.

I think the idea is a good one. If there was a way to have yearly conferences you could see not only what was happening in that particular community, but you'd also have the opportunity to talk about the common issues affecting shelters and so on. (Homeless sector)

The other thing is, do you have, balancing with cost/benefit, a national conference whether it is once every year, once every two years, that brings shelter people together? (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Even though technology has reduced the need for as many in-person meetings, the technology has its own costs and a number of organizations do not have the up-to-date computers and hardware necessary to easily engage in on-line conferences, as one example. Other needs for funding included consideration for the time that shelter staff would contribute.

Just the transportation budget to get people to meet can be huge and then there is accommodation. I think there would have to be. Where does the money come from that allows groups the luxury of going and travelling and spending time with each other? Who, among funding sources, wants to listen? (VAW sector)

High costs of travel, communications, and upgrading technology. (VAW sector)

I think it is important that the national body ensure that members are paid for their time-not just their flight and per diems. (Homeless sector)

It would be costly to try to bring people together physically. It's going to be a challenge to find an effective way to include all transition houses individually, and not only their provincial umbrella organizations. (Government sector)

Identifying difficulties in finding a funder or funders is easily understandable in the context that several of the provincial transition house associations are not currently funded or will need to find a new funder in the near future given the cuts to the federal government's Status of Women Canada. In addition, individual shelters would not have finances to contribute in any substantial way. The following quotes speak to these issues:

Right now some of the VAW shelter provincial organizations are barely staying afloat. The provincial organizations need to be adequately supported so we can network across the country. There needs to be some type of infrastructure to enable that network. Individually, shelters don't have those services. (VAW Sector)

We found it a struggle to get shelter workers out to meetings because their shifts need to be covered. The directors of the transition house associations need to be part of the network, as do the front line staff. (Homeless sector)

The transition houses (VAW) have a provincial association that used to be funded federally, but those dollars don't exist any more. The association hasn't met for over a year. They're trying desperately to get more money. (VAW sector)

Most of us are scrambling to stay afloat as individual agencies (VAW sector)

Funding has to be in place; there has to be resources not only for it to work nationally. Otherwise it just adds another layer than people can't respond to. If it's not government funding, I don't know where the money will come from. If they don't, I can't see it happening. (Homeless sector)

There would have to be core funding for a national network. It can't survive by the volunteer efforts of those in the field - they just don't have the time to do it. Everyone in the shelter is very busy, and don't have the time to do extra work. (Homeless sector)

Possible Funders

The key informants were asked about who would contribute to funding the national network if it were established. The majority of all respondents suggested that since the network was national, the federal government would be the logical funder.

The federal government has to play a lead role in providing resources and support. I don't think provincially there is resources for it. I think it's the role of provincial government to deliver housing services: providing housing, subsidizing affordable housing. At a federal level, it is their role to help networks and organizations to communicate better and learn from each other rather than provide direct service. (Homeless sector)

Most homeless organizations and women's shelters are funded by local and provincial sources. If it is something the federal government wants to promote, they need to become a funder. This has been a problem with the National Homelessness Initiative, because they only provide one time funding, but aren't there for the long term funding. I can see the same issue with the idea of the national network. (Housing Provincial/Territorial govt.)

There are a number of options. My personal favourite would be 100% federal funding. The provinces have the challenge to provide services through the shelters - the direct services. The networking costs, if each province were to bear a portion of that would be significant. For [province], it would be a huge cost because they have so many shelters ...money that arguably is redirected from direct service into networking supports. This should be federal funding. The commitment needs to be long term. (Government representative)

The key informants suggested a number of different federal departments or ministries that might provide financial support to a national network. These included the Homelessness Initiative Branch of Human Resources and Social Development, Status of Women Canada, Canada Mortgage and Housing, National Crime Prevention Centre, and Health Canada's National Clearinghouse on Family Violence.

I don't see us (as part of the provincial government) being involved in funding. It may fall within the mandate of the National Homelessness Initiative. They do have a research component. They may be appropriate because this is a national network. Status of Women may be appropriate because the network is working with women, but they lost a lot of their funding. However, those two departments might be an option. (Housing Provincial/Territorial govt.)

A national network would have to be federally funded. Maybe HRSD? Homelessness seems to have fallen through the cracks but HRSD has picked it up. Maybe Status of Women for VAW shelters, but they just got cut. Can you say it is a health issue? What about women who are depressed, or diagnosed with PTSD? Is it a health care issue when 1 in 4 women go to the emergency room because of family violence? Is it a Crime Prevention Issue? What is the role of government? Is it a skills development issue? (VAW sector)

We have the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence that is supposed to be bringing people together. Maybe it could be funded under that rubric, to bring shelter associations together. (VAW sector)

Others suggested that joint federal and provincial funding would be appropriate.

I think government should fund it but be hands-off. It is government's responsibility to take care of our most vulnerable so they should be paying for it. (VAW sector)

It should be funded through the federal and provincial governments. The province should see the need to coalesce with their counterparts in different provinces so they can provide the funding in their budgets to allow shelters to do their work. It's about improving and building on what is already there. Regionally, there are provincial associations of women's shelters (VAW), but I think there needs to be a national body. (VAW sector)

Only a few suggested that a national network not be funded by government. Those that did so argued the position to allow the group to advocate, since advocacy organizations are excluded from receiving resources from a number of government funding initiatives.

We don't want government funds for this kind of initiative; we don't want to bite the hand that feeds us. We want to be able to lobby effectively. (VAW sector)

I dream of a bequest so large that the network could be funded in perpetuity by the interest generated! I suspect the feds wouldn't want to fund us to lobby them, and neither would the provinces/territories. Maybe an anonymous benefactor? A rich industrialist? Oprah? Would a conglomerate of foundations take us on sequentially? (VAW sector)

Interestingly, while none suggested that a national network be funded solely through corporate sponsorship or foundations, a number suggested that these organizations could be approached for additional or project specific funding. National foundations might be particularly appropriate.

A VAW National Network could be funded through the Canadian Women's Foundation. They have a mandate around violence against women. (VAW sector)

Some foundations might also be an option. Nancy's Own is the foundation for women's organizations. (VAW sector)

If there were any foundations interested in homelessness, poverty, women and/or children they may also be willing to fund. (Homeless sector)

I think it should be a combination of federal funding, private corporations and then moderate, manageable, affordable, membership fees. (VAW sector)

While several suggested collecting membership fees from the shelter organizations and other members, this was seen as supplementary rather than comprising any significant core funding, because most shelters have limited funds for their own direct services.

In conclusion, there remain significant questions about whether and from whom the necessary funding would come to support the proposed national network of women's shelters and transition houses. One of the first tasks of a task group to move this initiative forward must be to determine how to access core, sustainable funding.

The Role of Technology in a National Network

One of the interview questions was to what extent technology could play a role in a national network of shelters and transition homes for women. The majority of the key respondents saw a central role for emails and teleconferencing, but only after some face-to-face meetings at the beginning of the initiative.

Realistically we're not going to get together regularly face-to-face. We're going to need to do large parts of the work in other manners. That is one way that a national network could help, to let us know what is available, what's possible, and knowing how to use it. (VAW sector)

Technology plays a critical role for national groups. You can get a lot of work done with email: it's fast, effective and doesn't cost much. That can make a big difference to what is getting done. In our national organization, we do email questions and then give the group a deadline to reply. Once the deadline arrives, we go with whoever has responded. Not many people don't have access to the internet. (Homeless sector)

It would be important for the coordinator of the network to have a lot of telephone contact. Whoever takes on the coordinating role, needs to have contacts, two or three in each province and you need to be consistently talking. It is different from an email. Emails tend to be more: this is the information, what is your response. But to actually having conversations with people in each province and getting a sense of who is who and what they do will make the network stronger. If it is just an email network, I'm concerned that it would just become a nuisance. (Homeless sector)

Definitely: emails, webcasts for training, website with downloadable seminars, conference calls. (VAW sector)

You need to be able to talk to people across the country. You need to have funding to do conference calls. You can only do so much through email. It is a little less expensive if everyone has access to SKYPE which is on-line; it's free, you download it off the internet, but it means you need a really up to date computer to run the program. But if every one has SKYPE you can do conference calls for free. We rely on the internet with our network and we wound up having to say "You cannot be a member if you don't have easy access to the internet and an

email account” because that is the only way, resource wise, to make our network work. (VAW sector)

Video conferencing could play a role. We should be paying attention to environment and not always traveling. We need to learn to do things really differently. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

We have video conferencing capabilities in the province, I think we’d be willing to support their use in support of this. (Housing Provincial/Territorial govt.)

There needs to be more training. Because funding is so limited, lots of shelters don’t have expertise in computers. I think it would be a really good network. It would be good if all the members could contact each other, if you could email everybody on the list about what you’re doing. If all of us could have our own website that would be good. (VAW sector)

Although technology has changed the face of how many front line services providers work, it is often time-consuming and must not take away from the important work of shelters in addressing client needs.

Technology can play a role but I don’t think it can be the only role. Websites, list serves, teleconferences can be useful in addition to face to face. People in direct service are responding to the people coming through their door, they don’t have the time to sit on the computer and read about what’s happening in Calgary. (Homeless sector)

Technology is a wonderful resource but I hate conference calls because you don’t get to know people and, honestly, most people end up multitasking through them. Emails are ok, but most times people are busy and won’t respond. I’m not opposed to technology but don’t think it’s the most effective way to work. (VAW sector)

Some respondents highlighted that technology has its limitations. Not all shelters have access to computer technology and email.

For a national organization technology is critical to support communications. As a national organization ourselves, we have to be able to bring people together and we need to be able to move across the country. Corporate sponsors are a possible source to help us with transportation, communication. They could help implement certain technology like webcams, videoconferencing. Teleconferences are okay but they have limitations. Discussion boards and chats are okay, but they have limitations. Videoconferencing has limitations but it helps to be able to speak and see someone to communicate. What are the technologies that would best support a national network to be more effective? In doing that it is important to talk to other national networks to see how they’ve addressed some of the challenges. (VAW sector)

There has to be technology. This can be a challenge in isolated communities. There is not telephone or internet services in some places. On-line conferencing, video conferencing ...the feds might be helpful if shelter people can gather at a federal office that has video conferencing capabilities. There’s still a cost to the

shelter to participate in video conferencing. Shelters are vastly under funded, so this could be a challenge. (Homeless sector)

We are using it all the time, but it can't be completely relied on as it is only available to some people. (VAW provincial/federal govt.)

Several key respondents mentioned Shelternet as a excellent resource, but in their comments also highlighted some of their own personal limitations with learning and utilizing technology. This consideration will need discussion, given the explosion of computer technology that is not necessarily coupled with the resources to upgrade or even purchase computers.

The internet is a valuable tool. Shelternet, is a big asset. Could be utilized to facilitate this process. There is the potential for sharing information electronically i.e. with Shelternet, but who has the time? (VAW sector)

We tried to get hooked up on Shelternet; it didn't work. We're all too busy. It's way easier to do it over email. Conference calls are good. It's good to get together a couple times a year. (VAW sector)

Data Collection

Sixteen of 26 respondents (total 59 respondents) mentioned data collection for the national network, considering this a good idea.

We should be sharing our data to get a national picture to see where the similarities and differences are. That in turn can inform our shelters, i.e. we've been dealing with the transgendered issues ...[it's] interesting to hear what other places are doing. We can learn from that. But in terms of getting data to them, is there any reason we wouldn't give them what we know? A lot of the provinces have a data collection system, so the idea would be to share that. It would have to be a contractual arrangement, where both parties are in agreement about what you're sharing. (VAW sector)

A national data base could be very beneficial. We've been trying to do this for Aboriginal women for years. (Homeless sector)

It's important to have members who are willing to share data. It would be hard to mandate that but on a voluntary basis it would be important to share information around welfare rates, priority housing waits, what is available in the different provinces and then possibly that information could be used as a lobbying tool either provincially or federally. You could start by asking your members to give examples of the data they collect and start from what people already have. From there, see if there is some kind of simplified form that people would be amenable to filling in or data that they would be willing to collect. People already know how many days a woman stays in their shelter and how many women they admit in a year. They've all got that already. Maybe some keep track of outcomes; where women end up, what kind of housing, whether they got subsidized housing, market housing, how many are forced to go back to an abusive partner because there are no options. Do they have enough support once they leave the shelter (VAW or general)? Figure out how to avoid making it another onerous form that people put off and then wouldn't do. Can you make it so the monthly stats people

have to turn into their funders, can also be fired off to the national office by email? (Homeless sector)

Five key informants highlighted that whether or not the groups collected data would depend on its mandate.

How a VAW national network collects data and shares information about clients would have to be developed by the network. We'd have to have a very thoughtful dialogue about what information would it be important to gather. We have our jurisprudence stats. We could do national trainings. If we could gather nationally and develop our agenda about what are the key areas of effort that people who deliver to abused women and their children require. Check for key trends. But we'd have to make it easy, using numbers we already gather. If it's one more thing, it probably wouldn't get done. (VAW sector)

It would depend on who hosted it, and how it would be fed back to the network. It depends on how you set it up. (Government representative)

I'm not sure. I think once the network gets together then would have to decide that. (Homeless & VAW sector)

Again, there's plenty of numbers gathered. I think the group itself would need to decide what the numbers will be used for. I guess I would find it difficult to really say, because it would take a really long time to get that figured out. (Homeless sector)

Only one of the twenty five respondents was cool to the idea of collecting data.

Putting on a network for sharing data or statistics is not very interesting or useful. (Homeless sector)

As noted in Chapter Three, while many shelters use the HIFIS system to collect data, several provincial transition house associations have developed their own system or utilize a different system. Several respondents suggested that HIFIS could be the prime data collection tool.

I'd prefer to use VOICES, but I know that a lot of grants assume that we'll be using HIFIS. There will have to be some coordination of this; I think that might already be happening between the developers of VOICES and HIFIS. (VAW sector)

It would be helpful to all be on a common database system. HIFIS does have the capacity to capture service delivery; it would make sense to me that we would not invent something new. (VAW sector)

We don't currently have anything in place. The federal government has HIFIS. The concept sounds very good, tracking the people accessing homeless shelters. Why not do something to enhance the usage of HIFIS, rather than doing something new. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Four respondents noted that it would be important to have funding to collect or consolidate the data.

However we all need the resources to be able to do this. (VAW sector)

We'd need an analyst, and information would have to be available to the federal and provincial governments as well as the network and its members. (VAW sector)

I think the network should also have some research funding. The researchers could help develop a common data collection set and maybe even doing some training. We need some training on how to collect the data the right way, research protocols and ethics, how we could make data collection less onerous and then feed it into a national research pool. (Homeless & VAW sector)

Role of the Federal and Provincial/Territorial Governments

A question asked of each key informant was what role, if any, they saw for the federal or provincial/territorial governments in a national network. Several key informants aptly stated that the roles of government would depend on the mandate of the organization and would need careful thought.

If it's mostly to give independent community resources the chance to share information, that's one thing, but if it's an opportunity for institutional resources to exchange on best practices, it's a very different proposition. In the same line of thinking, the provincial and federal government's place would also depend of the network's intentions. (Homeless sector)

I'm not sure we'd be an active participant. It would depend on the mandate. If it was sharing best practices, then yes. (Provincial/territorial govt. Housing)

Needs careful consideration. Perhaps they need to function like Federal Provincial Territorial working groups. It's rare that communities are involved in these working groups. You get into power imbalances, so I suggest they be community-based, with no government involvement. Funders are not equal partners, so they shouldn't be at the table. (Homeless sector)

I wonder what the extent of government involvement would be, and really where we would best fit. I see a need for shelters to get together, regionally or nationally, and lobby the government for change. Government departments could not be a part of that; it would put us in a conflict. It really depends on what the vision and purpose of network would be. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

There need to be meetings. Perhaps (government) as an advisory body, with federal/provincial/territorial representatives to address this issue. People need to come together to create a national strategy. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

While the most commonly mentioned role for both federal and provincial/territorial government in supporting the national network was funding, a small number of key informants mentioned other significant ways that the federal government could assist.

There would need to be federal funding and leadership at least to initiate the discussion, and to hold a national forum with a representative from each jurisdiction. If there is a commitment, because homelessness is a federal responsibility, we need some federal leadership on it as well. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Also at the table. The feds have to know what the problems are. I would have to assume it would be the role of the federal government to set up the infrastructure. (Housing Provincial/Territorial govt.)

The federal government should play a leadership role in not only providing funding, but linking it up to other federally related programs or departments. They have the Homelessness Initiative. I don't know how much this is linked to EI, or Canada Pension, or Health, do they make the connection? Do they see the connection between issues? (Provincial/Territorial govt.)

On the one hand I can see the reasoning for having individuals representing the government at the table so that everyone can engage in the process. I think some of the work would need to be done in subgroups so that government representatives are not involved in all aspects. The government reps should come to the big committee meetings only. (VAW sector)

It should be a federal government's task to create such a network. (VAW sector)

Across all sectors, there was less agreement about what role the provincial territorial governments would play in a national network.

It's best left to the community based agencies, to govern where things go. This removes part of the political agenda. It gives the power to those who are part of the networks. That being said, there needs to be a representation from the federal government and provinces on the network. With representation, it opens up things like resources, such as meeting space in different facilities, access to government publications. Perhaps even administrative support for tasks or groups. (Homeless sector)

I don't see the province having any kind of role in a national association. We essentially purchase services from the transition houses, from an independent body. We work to have a collegial relationship with the provincial association and with transition houses. I respect the work they're doing. But other than having some standards, we don't tell them what to do. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

Having the provincial government involved would be critical to ensure representation. We have several associations in [province/territory] in which agencies and organizations are involved. The provinces might have to be involved to make sure that everyone has representation from each association and to ensure consistency in terms of players at the table. (VAW Provincial/Territorial govt.)

The provincial governments may have a role in assisting the network or in listening to what the network has to say. But they would not have a role in governance. (VAW sector)

As noted, from the perspectives of the key informants, the roles of both federal and provincial governments could vary from solely supporting the initiative with various forms of funding and infrastructure support to being more actively involved. The decisions about their roles should be decided and will be clarified after the national network has agreed upon its mandate and key directions.

Suggested First Steps

If this initiative is to move forward, what would be the next steps? As suggested by the following key informants, a logical way to begin would be in a national forum bringing potential players together for an interactive discussion of what needs such an organization would address, its mandate, structure, membership and funding sources.

I'm more of a lumper rather than a splitter. I'd rather see groups merging, see how issues cross-over and understanding what underlying causes are common. Before the decision is made to form a network, perhaps a preliminary step would be to hold a national meeting inviting key potential members and going through a process about what could be the vision for the network, the ends it is trying to achieve and how it will get there. To see what common understandings exist among the people in the room. That should be facilitated by an external facilitator who is totally neutral, doesn't have any particular bias or obligations; someone who can help the group move along. If there are any assumptions out there that could later on prove faulty, there is a chance to really test those assumptions. There are frameworks to help groups do that kind of work. These calls are good, but they are one on one as opposed to a group conversation. (Homeless sector)

Building a network takes time. We don't need to start with our constitution, by-laws; we can start with a general scoping of how we want to work. Maybe with a Letter of Understanding; this is how we want to work. (VAW sector)

To kick something like that off you'd need to have a few days together to draw out the barriers and pluses of this. It would need some good facilitation. Communication is a big thing in coming together. (VAW sector)

In summary, the 77 individuals interviewed for this feasibility study each were asked to envision how a national network of women's shelters would function and be structured. They speculated about mandate, membership, technology and roles. Notably though each recognized that funding was a significant challenge, especially in light of some of their own organizations' current funding crises.

All realized that making decisions and finding resources to actually develop a national network would best be accomplished in a meeting of the key stakeholders. Such a meeting would allow for debate and negotiation about the many strategic decisions identified as central in this chapter.

Chapter Eight: Conclusions and Recommendations

As is clear from the voices of the key informants interviewed for this feasibility study, those who work closely with Canadian women who are either abused and or homeless have significant concerns about how to more effectively address their complex and significant needs.

This feasibility study may, in fact, represent one of the first times that the voices of the VAW and Homeless sector have been considered together. Although both groups of key informants acknowledge the overlap in the populations of abused women and homeless women, these women also have distinct issues that merit attention. Further the agencies that provide assistance are generally different and are funded by different provincial/territorial and federal departments. While some VAW shelter associations have also taken on responsibility for homelessness in their jurisdictions, and some organizations, such as YWCA Canada, offer shelters that address both issues (albeit often separately), in general, there has been little opportunity for dialogue between these constituents.

As mentioned previously, the process of considering the needs and services for homeless women and abused women together during the interview was unfamiliar to the majority of the key informants, whose work steeps them in the issues of one population or the other. Looking more broadly at the question of developing a national network for women's shelters and transition houses entails understanding both the common and the diverse needs of both populations. This created a paradigm shift for some who originally saw few benefits in the proposal national network and, as they considered the possibilities, became more positive about what such a network could accomplish.

This chapter summarizes the research findings, linking the results with other research on homelessness and woman abuse. The results are also considered in the context of the organization and funding issues of the shelter "system" in Canada. Finally, the chapter presents recommendations with respect to the feasibility of creating a national network of women's shelters and transition houses for consideration by national, provincial and territorial governments and shelter organizations.

The Results in Context

The 77 key interview respondents represent the major Canadian stakeholders with respect to these two populations (women affected by homelessness and abuse). We were successful in engaging all of the provincial transition house association directors and representatives from the National Housing Group for Women from most regions. Spokespersons responsible for services for violence against women for the provincial and territorial governments were also invited to respond and in every province at least one of these were interviewed.

We were less successful in connecting with the provincial/territorial government representative for housing and/or homelessness. Despite numerous attempts, only seven provincial/territorial representatives were interviewed (two for one province). Notably, though, as is reflected throughout, the housing and violence against women provincial/territorial departments are separate across the country and some key respondents had little knowledge of the issues for their counterparts.

Further, while it would have been interesting to connect with a number of single shelter organizations for their input, the voices of the major policy makers and organizations that deal with these issues across Canada are represented in the discussion and recommendations.

The key stakeholders who volunteered their time and ideas for the current study have extensive experience and expertise in their respective sectors, many having worked for decades. They clarified that the issues are serious, that they have been segregated by necessity because of different funders and services that are structured significantly differently.

The literature review on women's homelessness and intimate partner abuse confirmed that the research on these two groups is relatively separate. Importantly, though, the few studies that asked questions with respect to housing problems for abused women (Baker, Cook & Norris, 2003; Breton & Bunston, 1992; Charles, 1994; Malos & Hague, 1997; Mosher, Evans, Little, Morrow, Boulding, & VanderPlaats, 2004) and recent or historical partner/child abuse (Clarke, Pendry, & Kim, 1997; Morrell-Bellai, et al., 2000; Novac et al., 2002) found considerable overlap in women's experiences and needs.

This overlap is supported by the perceptions of the majority of the Canadian key informants interviewed for this study. Defining abused women who flee their partners because of intimate violence to reside in an emergency VAW shelter as "homeless" makes the point quite clearly. However, despite overlaps, the key stakeholders also noted important differences, one being the state of vulnerability of women once they have become homeless. One consideration about which all agreed was that when women leave shelters for either homelessness or woman abuse, the lack of the availability of safe and affordable housing across Canada has reached crisis proportions.

While the focus of this feasibility study, the creation of a national association of women's shelters and transition homes that addresses both violence against women and homelessness is new, the recommendation to create a national association of VAW shelters is not. In fact the fledgling Canadian Association of Women's Shelters (CAWS) was created in 2006 to address issues of violence against women from the over 500 VAW specific shelters across the country. The need for creating such a national body was supported by the recently published YWCA study of 10 shelter sites across Canada (Tutty, 2006) as follows:

As noted in the Phase I report (Goard & Tutty, 2003), the provincial representatives have no funding for a national collaboration/network nor is there a national association that would allow the provincial groups to meet and compare best practices, and strategies to address their common issues in struggling to safeguard the lives of women abused by intimate partners. Such an organization could benefit not only the shelters but provincial officials could be apprised of initiatives that have been effective in other regions. Sharing best shelter practices could ultimately save lives.

While the Canadian Association of Women's Shelters has been meeting over the past year, it has not yet been funded. More importantly, several of the Provincial

Associations that make up the membership have undergone closure or are facing funding emergencies that could result in their offices closing in the near future.

Similarly, other national and provincial groups may also face funding cuts. Shelters are acknowledged as an important Canadian resource, yet is also faced with financial insecurity.

The context of the anxiety about being able to continue one's work is a layer that must be acknowledged in examining whether a national network that focuses on issues beyond woman abuse or women's homelessness is a focus that merits attention. When one's survival is at stake it is difficult to take on new missions, no matter how meritorious.

The Feasibility of National Network

The significant and urgent need to address homelessness and violence against women were highlighted in the findings of this research. The substantial overlap in the populations of these women was acknowledged. Further, the key informants identified the lack of availability of safe and affordable housing in many regions of Canada as a crisis that especially impacts the country's most vulnerable citizens. The intersections of other issues with homelessness clarify the complexity of the world in which these women live. The majority of these women have endured historical discrimination and child abuse, as well as recent intimate partner abuse. A number of such women are Aboriginal or recent immigrants. Others have been given mental health diagnoses. Homeless and abused women may have substance abuse issues and some are exploited by prostitution, both of which can be survival mechanisms to deal with their extreme poverty and homelessness. These women are the responsibility of numerous institutions in Canadian society: health, mental health, child welfare, justice, and social assistance, none of which directly address their lack of housing. Yet each has an impact on whether she can access the secure housing base she needs in the hope of stabilizing her life.

Would creating a national network of women's shelter and transition housing with a dual focus on women's homelessness and violence make a difference? A minority of the 77 key informants saw little or no merit in creating a network focusing on the dual issues of women's homelessness and women's abuse by intimate partners (six of the ten respondents represented provincial/territorial governments: 3 in housing, 3 in the VAW sector). Another six were originally sceptical but became more positive as the interview progressed (3 from Provincial/Territorial governments)

While not dismissing the opinions of these individuals, the majority saw significant advantages in supporting the creation of such a network. That six of the ten respondents that did not support the network were representatives from provincial governments is instructive.

As conceived by the key informants, the mandate of the group would be networking to improve capacity, share best practices, challenges, and to inform policy. The mandate would be committed to the principles of inclusivity, with an anti-oppressive and anti-racist integrated framework. Collecting and sharing data on their clients would be a central focus that would advance not only our knowledge of the needs of clients but also how better to serve them. The idea is not to raise expectations that the VAW sector

should become experts in helping homeless women or that those in the homeless sector become VAW experts, but that sharing best practices, concerns and policy debates could improve services.

Further the network would provide a venue for these discussions that does not currently exist. This is particularly important so for those in the homeless sector that have few opportunities to consult about women's special needs and programs.

The hope expressed by the key informants was for sufficient funding for a national office and at least one staff member. While technology would be a central feature in the on-going communication, face-to face meetings of both the entire group and the executive would probably be necessary on an annual basis. While neither provincial nor federal government representatives would be members of the network, they would have a place at the table for consultations and mutual discussions.

The key stakeholders were emphatic that any funding to support a national network should not come from existing monies for direct services. The shelters for both VAW and homelessness have significant resource challenges and are "chronically under-funded". They do not have the capacity to support a national network on their own, no matter how important the initiative could ultimately be.

However, no clear consensus emerged about how the network would be configured. Several options are apparent but each involves the need for consultation among the key stakeholders. The central players for each model, however, are essentially the same:

- members of the Canadian Association of Women's Shelters (CAWS);
- representatives from homeless shelters that are either specific to women or offer distinct programs and/or services to women;
- members of national, provincial or local organizations that have a stake in issues connected with abused women and housing women such as the National Working Group on Women and Housing, Sheltersnet, The Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence and YWCA Canada.

Rather than suggesting options with respect to how a national network would be structured, decisions that should be made by the groups developing the network, the following recommendations suggest a process by which the discussions could continue. The ongoing dialogue would assess whether the need to address these concerning and important issues merits developing a national network.

Recommendations

The feasibility study offered the opportunity to canvass Canada's key stakeholders and leading experts in both policy development and the provision of services to abused and homeless women. These interviewees provided a barrage of valuable feedback about the complex and significant needs of these women, as well as the strengths and structural barriers to better assist them. Taking the interviews from these 77 key informants into consideration, the following recommendations are presented for consideration.

Recommendation 1: Host a national forum to allow key stakeholders to meet and discuss common purposes and mandates with respect to women, abuse and housing.

The issues identified by the key informants in the feasibility study are significant and critical. Offering a two to three day national conference to continue the discussion could result in networking that impacts services and policies to assist women afflicted by homelessness or abused by intimate partners. This forum would constitute the opportunity to discuss the advantages and challenges of creating a national network of women's shelters, building on the perspectives of the individuals interviewed for this study (many of whom should be invited to the forum). Such individual discussions cannot substitute for the debate and negotiation needed to formalize any decisions about forming a network.

As the key informants highlighted, it is not the responsibility of government to create a national network—that must come from the non-profit sector and the agencies that provide direct services and would constitute the membership. However government support in partially or fully funding the forum is justified, given that the outcomes could have national significance in improving the lives of women with respect to the overlapping issues of violence and homelessness.

The forum could be utilized to facilitate discussion about the many configurations that a national network could take, as well as deciding about core issues such as mandate. The forum would be instructive in any decision to support such a network. It could include representatives from VAW and homeless shelters with women's programming, as well as other national groups such as the National Working Group on Women and Housing, to name a few. Those planning the forum could consider also inviting the provincial government representatives from both VAW and housing sectors, especially since as a whole, these were the key informants with the least support for creating a national strategy. Hearing the joint and overlapping issues might create a greater appreciation for the potential of such a network.

Recommendation 2: Develop action plans to assist the provinces/territories in acknowledging and addressing the joint issues of housing for abused and homeless women.

One of the central activities that could logically take place at the national forum could be to create action plans within each provincial/territorial jurisdiction that are crafted to fit within the mandate of that region. While developing a national strategy is critical, practically the province/territories share the responsibility to address both housing and violence against women.

In addition to considering creating a national strategy, it would be advantageous to strategize about how to engage the provincial/territorial government representatives and shelters for woman abuse and women's homelessness in meaningful dialogue to improve services for women in need. The cross jurisdictional nature of the issue is becoming more complicated as provinces such as Alberta and Ontario have turned the responsibility for housing over to municipalities. When this is the reality, how can the housing needs of women be addressed? What are the changing and respective roles of the federal governments, the provincial/territorial governments, municipal governments, and how can the critical needs of communities be heard? This action planning process could

consolidate the learnings from the national network feasibility study and the national forum.

The action planning would involve community and provincial organizations with expertise in issues of woman abuse and women's homelessness strategizing about how to more effectively partner with provincial/territorial and federal government representatives to move forward the agenda of combating homelessness. This recommendation fits well within the government's new Homelessness Partnering Strategy, specifically addressing two of the key objectives: "consultation with stakeholders from the private and non-profit sectors and listening to their concerns" and "providing greater access to support networks appropriate to individual needs of homeless people" (December 19, 2006, press release on Canada's New Government's Homelessness Partnering Strategy).

Perhaps the suggestion merits a pilot project to assess the advantages of funding a provincial /territorial staff person in one or two provinces with the goal of furthering the action plans given the clear link to the Homelessness Partnering Strategy. The staff person, could, as one option, work out of the office of the Provincial Association of Shelters and Transition Houses in that region.

Recommendation 3: Support the already existing initiatives that currently address issues and services for abused and homeless women.

The feedback from the majority of key informants is that a national network to address women's issues of homelessness and abuse would address the significant gaps and disconnect between currently available services and shelters for homeless and abused women. Notably, however, currently existing national organizations such as the Canadian Association of Women's Shelters and the National Working Group on Women and Housing, YWCA of Canada and Shelternet, to name a few, are already addressing key aspects of the work that a national network of women's shelters could address, although none holistically address both issues. If such a network were established, these organizations would be the most obvious choices to take the lead in establishing a national network.

As mentioned, several of these organizations face their own funding challenges and crises. The extent to which their issues intersect with significant concerns about housing needs to be acknowledged, which would facilitate the possibility of their being eligible for governmental financial support.

Conclusions

In summary, it has been a privilege to facilitate this unique discussion. As presented by the key informants, the complexity of the issues for homeless women and those abused by intimate partners are overwhelming and the current institutional response simply inadequate. How can we more effectively meet the urgent needs of these women to assist them to leave abusive partners and create safe new homes for themselves and their children?

The key respondents in this study raise compelling questions and present tragic stories. How best to support them in their dedication to make a difference in the lives of

these women? Creating a national network of women's shelters and transition houses seems a logical and important first step.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide for Shelter and Community Representatives

It would be helpful to start by hearing a bit about your organization.

1. What is the major goal of your organization? How broad is your scope? Who are your major funders?
2. In what ways does your organization address issues of housing for abused women? For homeless women?
3. Currently, are you part of any formal networks? Informal networks? If yes, please describe who is involved and the major goals of networking.
 - How effective is the network/s?
4. What kinds of data do you currently collect with respect to your clientele?
 - What data collection programs do you use (HIFIS, Access, SPSS, Homes, others)?
 - Who has access to this information?
 - Are there problems with your data collection tool or how the data is utilized?
 - Could this data be utilized more broadly to raise the issue of women and homelessness and inform program development and policy discussions? If yes, how?

The next questions are about the context of housing and homelessness in your province?

5. How serious an issue is housing in your province (this might differ by region, urban/rural)?
6. To what extent do abused women have special access to safe and affordable housing after leaving shelters? Are there any special policies to address their needs? Programs? How available is second-stage housing?
7. To what extent do homeless women have special access to safe and affordable housing? Are there any special policies to address their needs? Programs?
8. Is there anything else you'd like to add about housing in your province?

The next questions are about your impressions of current general issues with respect to homeless and abused women in Canada.

9. From your work, what are the most critical issues affecting homeless and abused women in Canada?
10. How easily do women access safe and affordable housing after they leave shelters?
11. How much overlap is there between homeless women and woman affected by violence and abuse in your region/province? How are they addressed in your province?
12. Besides homelessness and abuse, what other issues impact these women?
13. Are there additional issues/constraints that affect women of diverse or marginalized backgrounds (Aboriginal, women of colour, immigrant women, older women, drug addicted women, sex-trade workers)? If yes, what are these?
14. How best can women with multiple issues be served?

The central focus of this research is about the feasibility of creating a national network of women's shelters and transition houses in order to improve their services, their capacity to share information and the lives of the women and children they work with. The next set of questions is about this network.

15. What advantages would you see to creating such a national shelter network?
16. What benefits, if any, would there be for your organization in such a network?
17. What challenges would you see in creating such a national shelter network? How might these challenges be addressed?
18. If a national network of shelters to address issues of abused and homeless women were created, who should be members?
19. How might such a network be funded?
 - How might it be governed?
 - What role would the provincial governments have?
 - The federal government?
 - Would technology play a significant role in the operation of such a network? If yes, how so?
20. How could such a network build capacity and share data and information to inform program development and policy discussions?
 - What would the network reporting procedures be and how could this data collection be most beneficial?
21. Do you have any other advice or suggestions about the feasibility of a national shelter network?
22. Is there anyone else you would recommend that we interview?

Thank you for your time.

Appendix Two: Interview Guide for Government Representatives

It would be helpful to start by hearing about your department.

1. In what ways does your department address issues of housing for abused women? For homeless women?
2. What kinds of data do you currently require shelters to collect with respect to homeless and abused women in your province?
 - Is there other data that you would like to be collected?
 - Does this include collecting data on “turn-aways”? If yes, how are these counted?
 - Who has access to this information?
 - How well is the data collection system working?
 - Are there problems with your data collection tool or how the data is utilized?

The next questions are about the context of housing and homelessness in your province?

3. How serious an issue is housing in your province (this might differ by region, urban/rural)?
4. To what extent do abused women have special access to safe and affordable housing after leaving shelters? Are there any special policies to address their needs? Programs? How available is second-stage housing?
5. To what extent do homeless women have special access to safe and affordable housing? Are there any special policies to address their needs? Programs?

The next questions are about your impressions of current general issues with respect to homeless and abused women in Canada.

6. From your perspective, what are the most critical issues affecting homeless and abused women in Canada?
7. How much overlap is there between homeless women and woman affected by violence and abuse in your region/province? How are they addressed in your province?
8. Besides homelessness and abuse, what other issues impact these women?
9. Are there additional issues/constraints that affect women of diverse or marginalized backgrounds (Aboriginal, women of colour, immigrant women, older women, drug addicted women, sex-trade workers)? If yes, what are these?

The central focus of this research is about the feasibility of creating a national network of women’s shelters and transition houses in order to improve their services, their capacity to share information and the lives of the women and children they work with. The next set of questions is about this network.

10. What advantages would you see to creating such a national shelter network?
11. What would be the benefits for your department in such a network?
12. What challenges would you see in creating such a national shelter network? How might these challenges be addressed?

13. How might such a network be funded?
 - What role would the provincial governments have?
 - The federal government?
 - Would technology play a significant role in the operation of such a network? If yes, how so? Could an existing provincial technology system assist in this?
14. How could such a network build capacity and share data and information to inform program development and policy discussions?
 - What would the network reporting procedures be and how could this data collection be most beneficial?
15. Do you have any other advice or suggestions about the feasibility of a national shelter network?

Thank you for your time.