

Ending Women and Girls Homelessness from Coast to Coast to Coast

“Some of us get to be safe,
some of us can never
let down our guard.”

– Pat Capponi

The Right to Safe Housing

Canada needs a rights-based strategy that prevents women and girls from becoming homeless and ensures they are safely housed with dignity. Homelessness prevention strategies and responses must fully implement the human rights of women and girls, and recognize the role of violence in homelessness. An adequate standard of living, including the right to live in security, peace and dignity is fundamental and must become a concrete reality in the lives of girls and women today. Canada must implement a rights-based national housing strategy, with a gender focus, that ensures security of the person as guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and honours treaty commitments.

The High Cost of Homelessness

Women and girls pay a high price for not having a safe place to live. Homelessness exacts a heavy toll on their health and is a constant threat to safety. Homeless women under 45 years old are 10 times more likely to die than women living in housing. The annual sexual assault rate of women living on the street in Toronto is 20%. Many street-involved women have survived abuse and trauma that led to mental health issues and substance use, and are re-exposed on the street. Without stabilizing supports, the options are costly and inappropriate interventions that don't lead to positive change: hospitals, jails and police services.

Losing Home

Social policies can increase the homelessness of women and girls, or they can reduce it. All too often, policy changes have hurt not helped.

- Low social assistance rates leave women and children – and disproportionately those from First Nation, Métis and Inuit, immigrant and racialized communities – mired in poverty, while asset rules force women to reduce or dispose of assets before they can get help, blocking the way out of poverty.
- Continuing to deduct child support payments from social assistance ensures there's no benefit to the family.
- The strong correlation between girls who've been in state care and who become homeless continues.
- Governments have walked away from social housing. Women flee violent homes for the safety of shelters, but when they're ready to leave shelter, they can't find safe housing they can afford.

Finding Home

It's time to change direction and reduce the homelessness of women and girls. It's time to ensure that safe housing is available for women leaving shelters, on their own or with their children. Time for girls who leave home to escape domestic sexual abuse to know there is a number they can call for help that will lead to a safe place to live and a chance to finish their education. Time for women struggling on the streets to know there's housing with the supports they need, whether it's for trauma recovery, ongoing mental health support, engagement with substance use issues, or joining a welcoming community. While broad policy change is essential, programs play a strong role in prevention and reduction. Programs and services need to be inclusive and to promote and respect women's rights to dignity, autonomy and self-determination.

- Expand services for women recovering from abuse and trauma.
- Expand housing and support programs for women leaving shelters and prisons.
- Increase court diversion and prevention programs to reduce criminalization.
- Expand addiction recovery and detoxification programs for women.
- Expand support and language services for newcomer women.

Ending Homelessness for Women and Girls in Canada

Crisis shelters and food banks help struggling women and girls to continue struggling. They don't end the crisis. There's no safety, nowhere to call home and no path to the future. Our vision is every woman and girl living in a safe, supportive home.

How do we get there? Bold change.

- Take serious action on violence against women. Whenever it's safe, ensure abused women keep their homes through effective mechanisms.
- Address women's mental health with services, not prisons.
- Prevent and respond to domestic child sexual abuse. Take girls seriously.
- Reform child welfare systems using a feminist and anti-oppression analysis.
- Raise the rates and the minimum wage to end women's poverty, especially the acute poverty of First Nation, Métis and Inuit women and women with disabilities.
- Address intergenerational impacts of Residential Schools, systemic discrimination, and the colonization of Indigenous people.
- Provide real security of tenure: End evictions of women and girls.

“I don't think women
should have to
sell their bodies
just to survive.”

– Drop-in program
attendee



“A lot of my homelessness
was psychological.
I was sexually abused
as a child and never
told anyone.
I ran my whole life ...”

– Shelter resident



“When I was homeless
I never stopped
going to sweat lodges.
I never stopped going
to the Sundance.
I never stopped
smudging and
I never stopped
using my drum.”

– Carrie