

“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

### 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.

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

– Drop-in program attendee



“When I was homeless I never stopped going to sweat lodges. I never stopped going to the Sun-dance.”

## Action NOW!

### End Women's and Girl's Homelessness in Canada:

We demand immediate action from the federal government on:

- A NATIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY including a return to promotion and creation of affordable housing options.
- A NATIONAL ACTION PLAN on Violence Against Women beginning with a National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women.
- A NATIONAL CHILD CARE STRATEGY providing access to quality, affordable child care.

### End Women's and Girl's Homelessness in All Provinces and Territories:

We demand immediate action from provincial and territorial governments on an adequate standard of living, affordable housing and support programs:

- Increase income support and social assistance to cover the actual cost of shelter.
- Implement rent supports, ensure security of tenure and rent control.
- Increase the supply of affordable housing: permanent, transitional and supportive.
- 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.
- Expand addiction recovery and detoxification programs for women.
- Prevent and respond to domestic sexual abuse of girls.
- Create girl-only transitional and long-term housing based on feminist principles and practices.
- Review child welfare systems based on feminist and anti-oppression principles.

### End Women's and Girl's Homelessness in Our Communities:

We demand that municipal governments:

- Ensure that development takes women and girls into account.
- Use safe community design principles.
- Adopt and fund plans to end homelessness with a gender lens.

All Our Sisters and H4W demand immediate action to end the homelessness of women and girls from coast to coast to coast



May 12-14  
2014

London Convention Centre  
London, Ontario

“A lot of homelessness was running, running in my mind, running away, running to something, running away from something...”

– Shelter resident

## Second National Forum on Security of Housing and Safe Communities for Women Coast to Coast to Coast

### A Call To Action

revised May 13/14

### Across Canada Women and Girls Struggle Without a Crucial Necessity of Life – A Safe Home

210,000 people are estimated to be homeless in Canada, and almost half of them – 103,000 – are female. Street counts show 25-30% of people living on the streets or in shelters in large Canadian cities are women. And homeless women stay away from the street as much as they can.

Young women and girls are homeless in alarming numbers. Most homeless families are single parent families, led by women. Poverty and discrimination put women with disabilities and racialized women at elevated risk.

### Just Because You Don't See Women Sleeping on the Street... Doesn't Mean They're Safe at Home

Life on the street is rough. For safety, women and girls try to get off the street and hide that they're homeless. They couch surf with friends or relatives or trade survival sex for a place to crash for the night. Fleeing abusive, unsafe homes, girls squat in unsafe abandoned buildings, or trust the promises of predatory older men. Homeless women and girls change locations cycling between crashing with friends, staying in a shelter and spending nights on the street to avoid wearing out their welcome and closing off a crucial lifeline.

### Running From Violent Homes

Every year, tens of thousands of women leave their homes, many with their children, for the temporary safety of a shelter for abused women. Many girls who “run away” from home are running from child sexual abuse, violence or homophobia. For these women, violence is the immediate cause of their homelessness and a women's shelter or transition house may be the bridge to