

To: FEWO - Standing Committee on the Status of Women
House of Commons, Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

From: Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment (CCFWE)
Ottawa, ON K1N 9N5

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Submission on the Role and Capacity of Women's Shelters and Transitional Housing to Support Women and Girls in Canada

There is a strong connection between the lack of safe, affordable, and accessible housing and people experiencing gender-based violence (GBV) being stuck in or returning to abusive relationships ([Canadian Centre for Housing Rights, 2024](#)). A [2022 study by CCFWE](#) found that 79% of shelter workers reported that survivors remained in abusive relationships because they had nowhere safe to go. Canada's National Housing Strategy (2024) recognizes this by making housing needs of women experiencing GBV a key priority. For women and children fleeing domestic violence, access to women's shelters in the short-term and affordable and safe housing in the long term is crucial to regaining agency over their lives.

CCFWE revealed a strong connection between GBV and economic abuse, with a 96% prevalence of economic abuse among people experiencing GBV. Economic abuse encompasses a range of behaviours that allow someone to control someone else's economic resources or freedoms. It refers to various tactics that limit an individual's financial autonomy, including but not limited to: denying them access to their money, exerting control over their resources, or leveraging intimidation and threats to constrain their economic freedom.

While the federal government recognizes the importance of addressing [economic abuse](#), **economic abuse is often excluded in policy discussions about housing**. It is also not widely understood, resulting in systems (legal, housing, financial) ill-equipped to recognize and respond to its long-term impacts. This includes coerced debt, financial ruin, bad credit, or disrupted employment - all elements that directly impact a person's access to housing.

Economic abuse is often why people experiencing violence "just don't leave". They literally cannot afford to. Despite the need for immediate, safe, and affordable housing to escape GBV, many women do not rely on shelters and transitional housing, but on more precarious and dangerous housing arrangements. This is in part due to housing programs designed explicitly for women and children escaping abuse being overwhelmed by the demand. It is also because shelters often do not meet the safety needs of women experiencing GBV, such as women-only trans-inclusive, accessibility-friendly, and child-friendly spaces. In situations of economic abuse, this is compounded by the restrictive time frame of shelter stays (usually one to two months at most), as economic abuse often does not end at separation, impacting housing.

Economic instability and poverty, both as consequences and enablers of economic abuse, factor heavily into women's housing insecurity and homelessness. Women are disproportionately employed in part-time, casual, or contract jobs that offer low wages, no benefits, and limited job security. Breaks in employment caused by the result of economic abuse and GBV further compound these challenges, disrupting professional networks, eroding confidence, and making re-entry into the workforce difficult, deepening financial vulnerability.

Single mothers are particularly at risk of homelessness. In Canada, 77.2% of one-parent households are women, and one in six single mothers lives in poverty (Statistics Canada, 2022). The lack of affordable childcare, fair wages, and robust income support programs intensifies their risk of housing insecurity. When mothers experience homelessness, it often results in intergenerational cycles of homelessness.

Systemic barriers to housing security are even more pronounced for equity-deserving populations, such as First Nations, Metis, Inuit, Black, and racialized survivors, newcomers, [people with disabilities](#) and gender-diverse people, and in smaller and rural communities ([Canadian Centre for Housing Rights, 2024](#)). Creating effective policies to address housing insecurity and homelessness must therefore take an intersectional approach that addresses housing needs, economic injustice, and gender-based violence.

While single-mother families and trans women are part of the fastest-growing segments of the unhoused populations, the actual scale of these groups' housing insecurity is significantly underrepresented, as data heavily focuses on men, who are the majority of shelter users ([64.7% in 2024](#)). This makes it difficult to create appropriate policy responses and highlights the need for data practices that show the real picture of housing insecurity.

Recommendation 1: Review and consider [CCFWE's recommendations](#) related to enhancing housing supports for people experiencing economic abuse, endorsed by nearly 300 organizations, to actualize the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence.

Recommendation 2: Recognize that women experience housing precarity differently from men by funding shelters and transitional housing that can adequately accommodate the specific safety needs of women and gender-diverse people. This includes women-only spaces, trans-friendly spaces, accessible spaces, and child-friendly spaces, creating units dedicated to survivors and their children.

Recommendation 3: Improve data to reflect the diverse needs and realities of all shelter and transitional housing users - including economic abuse in risk assessment.

Recommendation 4: Sustainably fund and expand “no strings attached” emergency shelter and transitional housing programs to better fit the needs of people experiencing GBV through a GBA+ lens, including extending stay timelines.

ABOUT THE CANADIAN CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

The [Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment](#) (CCFWE) is the only non-profit organization in Canada that solely focuses on economic abuse and economic injustice in the context of GBV through research, education, advocacy, and financial empowerment.

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