



BC Society of
Transition Houses

Keys to Home:

*Supporting Housing for Women
Experiencing Violence*



Gaps Analysis Report

December 2022

With Gratitude we recognize that the BC Society of Transition Houses' office is located on unceded Coast Salish territory, shared by the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), xʷməθkwəyəm (Musqueam) and sə́lilwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

As this work discusses the lack of safe, affordable and appropriate housing after violence, experienced by women throughout British Columbia, we recognize that this discussion includes all First Nations throughout the province.

We understand that the displacement of Indigenous peoples from their lands and other ongoing effects of colonialism are foundational to the disproportionate number of Indigenous women and girls experiencing homelessness and violence. We recognize the importance of valuing the connection between all living things and all systems we have created. As such, we understand that the issues of homelessness and violence can only be fully addressed through sustainable systemic change.



Acknowledgements

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We also recognize it is not the role of anti-violence workers to find the solution to the housing crisis in BC. The goal of the Keys to Home project is to build capacity in the anti-violence sector without increasing the already high burden on frontline workers to manage roles far outside of their job descriptions.

Frontline staff continue to bring compassion, strength and creativity to the work they do every day and work tirelessly to improve the lives of others and strive to ensure the clients they serve find a home. We offer our sincerest gratitude.



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Introduction

In recent years, the BC Society of Transition Houses (BCSTH) has facilitated research and projects related to the intersection between gender-based violence and housing precarity. A key area of focus has been the heightened consequences the housing crisis in British Columbia (BC) has had on women and their children experiencing violence. BCSTH is a member-based, provincial umbrella organization that, through leadership, support and collaboration, enhances the continuum of services and strategies to respond to, prevent and end violence against women, children and youth. BCSTH supports over 120 members that provide Transition Houses, Second and Third Stage Houses, Safe Homes and the Prevention, Education, Advocacy, Counselling and Empowerment (PEACE) programs¹ across the province to women and children who have experienced violence.

Informed by our members' experience and expertise, BCSTH identified a severe lack of appropriate and affordable long-term housing for women and children after violence. Due to the lack of housing, women and children who access emergency or temporary housing through Safe Homes, Transition Houses, and Second and Third Stage Housing are often left with nowhere to move on to, creating a bottle neck in temporary housing services and programs which has led to increased waitlists in a sector that is already over capacity (Knowles et al., 2019). As determined through BCSTH's [Getting Home Project](#), the lack of available housing and limited supply of temporary shelter or programs has contributed to women continuing to experience violence and housing precarity across the province (Ashlie et al., 2021; Schwan et al., 2020; Maki, 2019).

In 2018, the province's *Homes for BC: 30-Point Plan for Housing Affordability* and in particular, Point 16, committed \$141M over 3 years, and \$734M over the next 10 years to BC Housing's Women's Transition Housing Fund (WTHF) to build over 1,500 spaces² for women and children who have experienced or are at risk of violence (Province of British Columbia, 2018). This investment in 1,500 new spaces will almost triple the existing women's transition housing portfolio in BC and transform the capacity of this sector. In the fall of 2018, the WTHF received 75 submissions from across the province;

¹ The Prevention, Education, Advocacy, Counselling and Empowerment (PEACE) program for children and youth experiencing violence, (formerly Children Who Witness Abuse) is a free, confidential program across BC for children and youth aged 3 to 18 who have experienced domestic violence.

² Spaces include Safe Homes, Transition Houses, Second and Third Stage Housing and Long-term housing.



currently, 26 of those projects are in varying stages of development and almost all of them are BCSTH members.

Clearly, this investment in Second Stage and long-term housing for women and children experiencing violence is a necessary step in the prevention of violence against women across the province. However, it is important to consider the differences in temporarily providing services and shelter to women and children and becoming a long-term housing provider. For many of our members who have expertise in the operation of Safe Homes and Transition Houses, the shift to the development and operation of long-term housing options is a steep learning curve. Many anti-violence organizations are already operating over capacity due to a lack of funding, staff shortages, high demand for the limited spaces throughout the province, and more. While BCSTH members have quickly adapted to their new roles as housing providers out of necessity, they have indicated that they require further support to build their knowledge and skills to develop and operate sustainable housing projects.

The Keys to Home Project

Prior to the WTHF, BCSTH members were already adapting to the growing demand for housing options for women and children. Many expanded their mandates from temporarily sheltering women and children experiencing violence to include housing solutions for women ranging from building housing partnerships with non-profit housing providers, co-ops, and private landlords, the construction of new rental and second stage housing units, and taking over the operation of existing long-term housing. However, there is an opportunity to learn from the 26 projects funded by the WTHF currently developing in order to provide more resources and training for future anti-violence organizations interested in becoming long-term housing providers. As such, the [Keys to Home](#) project was developed with the objective of providing capacity building through training and organizational support to BCSTH members embarking on expanding their mandates from temporarily sheltering women and children experiencing violence to providing safe long-term housing options throughout BC.

Key Objective

Provide capacity building through training and organizational support to BCSTH members embarking on expanding their mandates from temporarily sheltering women and children experiencing violence to providing safe long-term housing options throughout BC.



The Keys to Home project is a two-year project that will result in the creation of a curriculum and tool-kit to inform those looking to provide long-term housing to women and their children who have experienced violence. Providing housing to women who have experienced violence requires a depth of knowledge in anti-violence work, trauma- and violence-informed and women-centred practice, as well as in housing funding, development, and management. Currently, there are a lack of resources and trainings available that encompass these needs. The objective of the Keys to Home project is to provide these resources in order to increase the capacity of our members to become housing providers and ultimately improve safe, affordable and appropriate housing options available to women who have experienced violence.

The initial step towards identifying the most useful resources and trainings that can be provided is understanding the current gaps in knowledge. As anti-violence organizations are diverse in terms of region, experience, capacity and communities they serve, the challenges they face in providing housing are likely to be diverse in nature. However, this gaps analysis identifies the most common areas that were identified in consultation with our members. This gaps analysis will provide an understanding of the long-term goals and vision for the provision of adequate and appropriate women-centred housing in order to identify what is currently lacking in terms of resources and training to fully realize this vision. Furthermore, the analysis will identify the current circumstances of long-term housing provision by anti-violence organizations throughout the province, the resources and trainings available to do this work and what the key gaps currently are. Lastly, recommendations for next steps to address the existing gaps will be explored.

About BCSTH and the Keys to Home Advisory Committee

BCSTH is the lead organization on the Keys to Home project which is a collaborative project with other umbrella organizations that have expertise in housing from various perspectives both provincially and nationally. The project partners of Keys to Home are BCSTH, BC Housing, the BC Non-Profit Housing Association (BCNPHA), and the Co-Operative Housing Federation of BC (CHF BC). The Advisory Committee is composed of the project partners as well as Vancity Community Foundation (VCF), the Aboriginal Housing Management Association (AHMA) and Women's Shelters Canada (WSC).

BCSTH uses an intersectional feminist framework to engage in gender-based analyses, while also taking into consideration other social structures and power relations that impact women's lives (i.e., ableism, heterosexism, racism, etc.). In consideration of community contexts, BCSTH encourages reflection upon our social positions in our



daily interactions; that is, the consideration of our own interests and perspectives and the ways in which we hold and exert power. Consequently, this approach informs strategic planning efforts in terms of how we develop more inclusive services by asking questions about who is included and who is excluded, and about who is heard and who is silenced.

The BC Non-Profit Housing Association (BCNPHA) is the provincial umbrella organization for BC's non-profit housing sector with over 600 members including societies, businesses, individuals and stakeholders. BCNPHA members manage over 60,000 long-term and affordable units of housing in 2,500 buildings across the province. BCNPHA conducts research, hosts conferences, and develops training to support the non-profit sector. In recognizing the significant challenges that women leaving violence face when trying to access affordable housing, BCNPHA has joined this project bringing networks, research and partnerships that will contribute to the Keys to Home objectives.

The Co-operative Housing Federation of BC (CHFBC) is also a member-based organization representing BC's housing co-ops. CHFBC is committed to promoting inclusive communities in the new and existing co-ops of BC. In the past, through campaigns, trainings and specific funds, CHFBC has facilitated women experiencing violence to access co-op housing. For example, CHFBC has developed the Domestic Violence Relief Fund, which assists women who have experienced violence with funding to access co-op housing. CHFBC has signed on as a partner to play an active role as an Advisory Committee member on this project to continue to help make co-operative housing a reality for women experiencing violence in BC.

BC Housing is a crown corporation that develops, manages and administers a wide range of subsidized housing options across British Columbia as well as administering funding to non-profit organizations to operate Transition Houses, Second Stage Housing and Safe Homes. The organization is committed to housing women and children at risk of violence and integrating best practices into existing and new housing initiatives. They contribute knowledge of the WTHF projects, resources, research, and opportunities to integrate lasting changes into the housing sector.

Vancity Community Foundation (VCF) is a public charity created to help gather resources to realize the potential that exists when invested in communities. Through the generosity of donors, expertise of staff and partner organizations, VCF strives to be a catalyst for transformation. As an advisory committee member for the Keys to Home Project, VCF brings financial acumen and strategic focus to empowering economic



security for women experiencing violence as they face financial barriers to long-term housing.

Aboriginal Housing Management Association (AHMA) is an umbrella organization made up of 41 Indigenous housing providers and Canada's only Indigenous Housing Authority. With over 25 years of experience, currently, AHMA members oversee 5,400 units that collectively house an estimated 8,700 Indigenous individuals and families living in urban, rural, and northern regions of British Columbia. In addition to affordable and culturally safe housing, AHMA members offer many support services; from homelessness prevention to transition homes, daycare, health and well-being, substance use support, and more.

Women's Shelters Canada (WSC) is based in Ottawa, Ontario. WSC brings together 14 provincial and territorial shelter organization. WSC represents a strong, unified voice on the issue of violence against women on the national stage. Through collaboration, knowledge exchange, and adoption of innovative practices, WSC advances the coordination and implementation of high-quality services for women and children accessing VAW shelters and transition houses. WSC brings a Canada-wide perspective and a wealth of research and knowledge as an advisory committee member.

Pulling from the expertise and knowledge of the housing sector of each organization, the Keys to Home Project aims to strengthen relationships within the community housing sector and create connections for our members. Furthermore, the Keys to Home project will highlight existing valuable trainings and resources and also contribute the needed perspective of feminist, intersectional and women-centred housing provision through a new curriculum and tool-kit.

Definitions

BCSTH recognizes the importance of language within intersectional feminist research. As such, key terms used throughout the report are identified and defined below.

Women

The term women used in this report refers to and is inclusive of all self-identified women. While we recognize that gender-based violence has significant impacts on cisgender women and girls in Canada, we also acknowledge that 2SLGBTQIA and gender diverse people are disproportionately impacted by experiences of violence and continue to experience significant barriers to anti-violence supports and services.



The Experience of Violence

There are many terms used within violence prevention services in relation to women who have experienced violence. “Women who experience/ have experienced violence” are used throughout this report to capture all forms of violence inclusive of, but not limited to, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and domestic violence.

The Housing Continuum

This report discusses the following stages and service models of housing that together create a housing continuum. The housing continuum (see Figure 1 below) is fluid, as individuals enter and exit services at any point and it is not a linear step-by-step process to securing long-term housing.

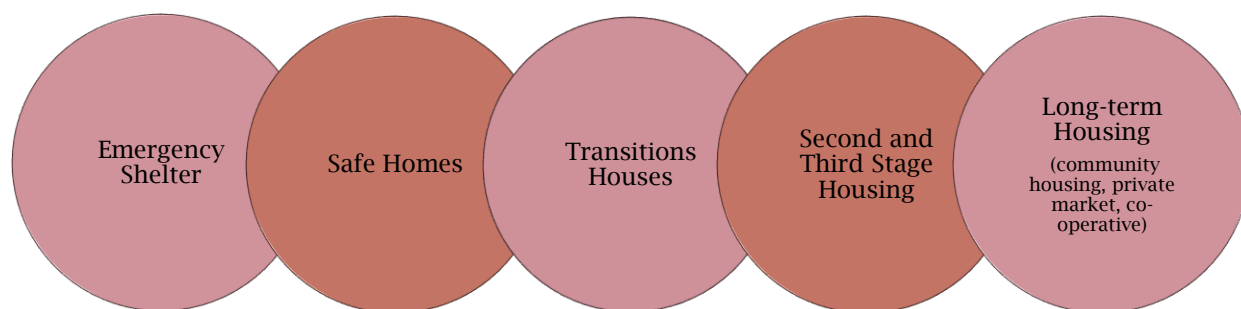


Figure 1: The Housing Continuum

“Emergency Shelters” are immediate, short-term accommodations for those experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness (BC Housing, 2022).

“Safe Homes” are community-based networks of private homes that shelter women and their children. They typically offer short stay placements, but can be longer if required and also provide outreach services in small rural communities that are often geographically far apart (BC Society of Transition Houses, n.d.).

“Transition Houses” provide short- to long-term shelter and related support services to women, children, and youth who have experienced or are at risk of violence and offer temporary safe shelter and support to enable women to make decisions about their future (BC Society of Transition Houses, n.d.).

“Second Stage Housing” provides service-enhanced affordable temporary housing for women, children and youth who have recently experienced violence. This model offers women, children and youth secure, affordable housing for 3 to 12 months, as well as support and programming that enable women and families to make decisions about



their future. Whereas “Third Stage Housing” provides supportive housing for women who have left violent relationships and who no longer need crisis service support through independent long-term housing with lengths of tenancy from 2 to 4 years (BC Society of Transition Houses, n.d.).

“Long-Term Housing” is any form of permanent housing, including within the private market. Outside of the private market, there is “social” or “public housing”, used interchangeably, to describe any housing project owned and operated either by the government or a non-profit. Non-profit housing refers to a housing development which is community-based and entirely operated by a non-profit organization (BC Housing, 2022).

Another commonly referred to housing model is “Co-operative Housing”, wherein residents own and operate the housing development themselves, through a membership system (BC Housing, 2022).

Methodologies

BCSTH approaches research and projects through an intersectional³ feminist lens in order to apply a critical lens to systems of power and oppression and identify necessary action. The following BCSTH principles guided the Keys to Home project:

- ◆ Feminist
- ◆ Respectful
- ◆ Responsive
- ◆ Women-centred
- ◆ Transparent
- ◆ Relevant

The Keys to Home project is a community-based project, using the insights and expertise of anti-violence organizations and provincial umbrella housing organizations to inform and support the provision of long-term housing within the anti-violence sector. In order to identify existing gaps to do this work, the guiding research questions were as follows:

- ◆ What is the current state of provision of long-term housing by the anti-violence sector throughout the province?
- ◆ What resources and trainings exist to do this work?
- ◆ What is the long-term goal and vision for the adequate and appropriate provision of women-centred housing throughout the province?

³ A framework that acknowledges the various lived experiences, social locations and power dynamics that intersect to shape inequities. (Hankivsky, 2014).



- ◆ What further resources and trainings are needed to provide adequate and appropriate women-centred housing to women and their children who have experiences of violence?

To answer these questions, a literature review of academic and grey literature was first conducted in order to identify existing work in the area of women-centred housing and the provision of housing to women who have experienced violence. Furthermore, existing trainings and resources were identified that could be beneficial to organizations developing and operating housing, specifically housing for women who have experienced violence.

Next, 15 informal interviews were conducted with BCSTH members who had experience in operating long-term housing, were developing long-term housing or who were interested in providing long-term housing but had faced multiple barriers to do so. Notes were taken during each interview and were coded for comparison and to identify key themes and insights. 12 of the member organizations consulted with had received WTHF funding and were in varying stages of development.

Lastly, an online survey was created using *Survey Monkey* and distributed to Executive Directors and management of BCSTH member organizations via the BCSTH listserv and newsletter. The survey used closed and open-ended questions and responses were confidential and anonymous. Qualitative data collected from the survey was coded thematically and the quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. In total, the survey received 27 responses which included a fairly equal distribution from all 7 of BCSTH's member regions (see Figure 2 below), including urban, rural and remote or isolated locations (see Figure 3 below), with the majority of respondents residing in small population centers (see Figure 4 below). Furthermore, there was an equal response from organizations that already provide long-term housing to women (n=13) who have experienced violence and those that do not (n=14).

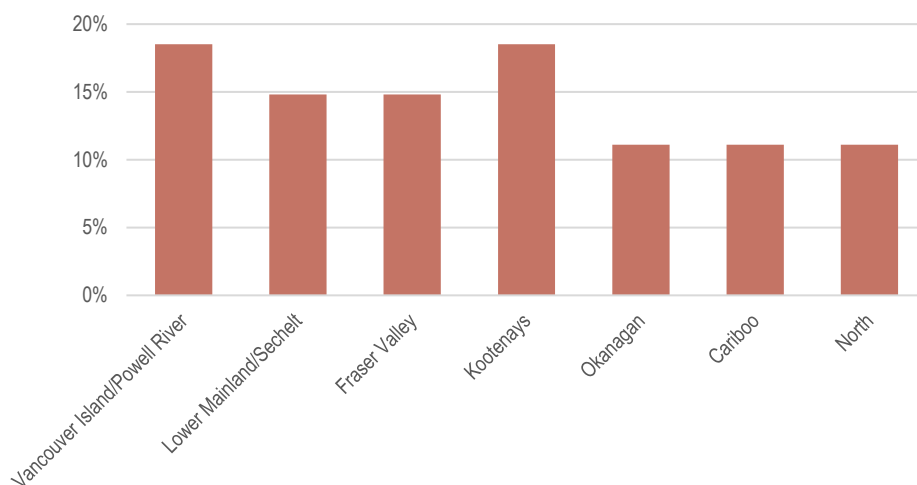


Figure 2: In which regions does your organization primarily operate?

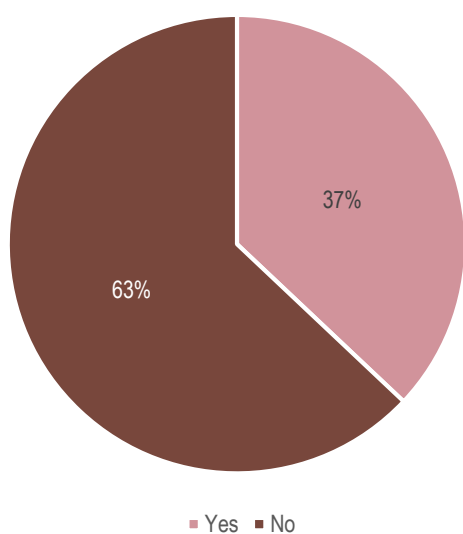


Figure 3: Is your community remote or isolated?⁴

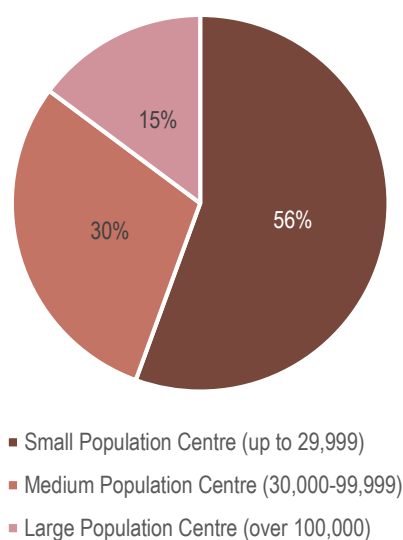


Figure 4: What size community does your agency serve?

⁴For the purposes of this survey, remote or isolated is defined as a community or geographic location with a population of less than 5,000 and/or at least 100 km from a city of >29,000. Or a community or geographic location without year-round road access. The project recognizes that geographic isolation can become compounded by lack of access to social networks, internet and cellphone service, and financial resources.



Limitations

Although the survey sample was representative of our members, 27 is a relatively small sample to draw any generalizable findings from the results. However, there are still many insights to be gained from analyzing the responses thematically and identifying probable areas of interest for further training and resources. Furthermore, the majority of those who participated in this research were in the development stages of their housing projects and had received funding from the WTHF; as such, the information gathered largely reflects the experiences during this stage of housing provision and with this funding stream. There is more in depth research required that focuses on anti-violence organizations that are currently operating long-term housing and experiences with other funding streams.

A Vision for Women-Centred Housing

As previously discussed, increasing capacity within the anti-violence sector to provide housing will improve safe affordable and appropriate housing options for women who have experienced violence. Violence is a leading cause of women experiencing homelessness (Maki, 2017; Knowles et al., 2019; Schwan et al., 2020), and as such, ensuring anti-violence organizations can provide housing options for the population they serve is an impactful approach to decreasing women's homelessness throughout the province. The Getting Home Project identified that women often must choose between safety and housing (Ashlie et al., 2021). Increasing the housing stock for women is one way to reduce the risk of further violence as a result of the housing crisis. Building capacity in the anti-violence sector to provide long-term housing will improve housing options in two main ways:

- ◆ **Increase available units**

More units of affordable housing will enable women to move on from anti-violence services and thus will alleviate the current bottleneck in services that is a current barrier for women accessing the support they need.

- ◆ **Improve housing quality**

Supporting anti-violence organizations to provide housing will result in more appropriate housing for women who have experienced violence through applying a trauma- and violence-informed and women-centred approach that the anti-violence sector has expertise in.



Among those surveyed, more than half of BCSTH members identified that long-term housing is a priority service to add to their mandates (see Figure 5 below) although only 26% of respondents currently operate long-term housing (see Figure 6 below).

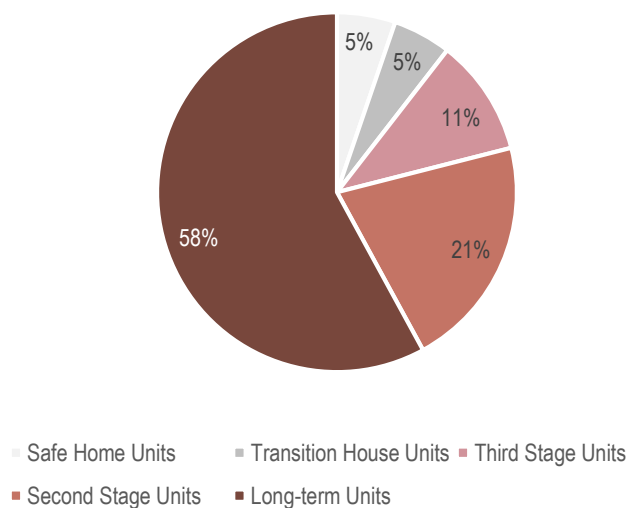


Figure 5: If your organization could add an additional service to your mandate, what would be priority?

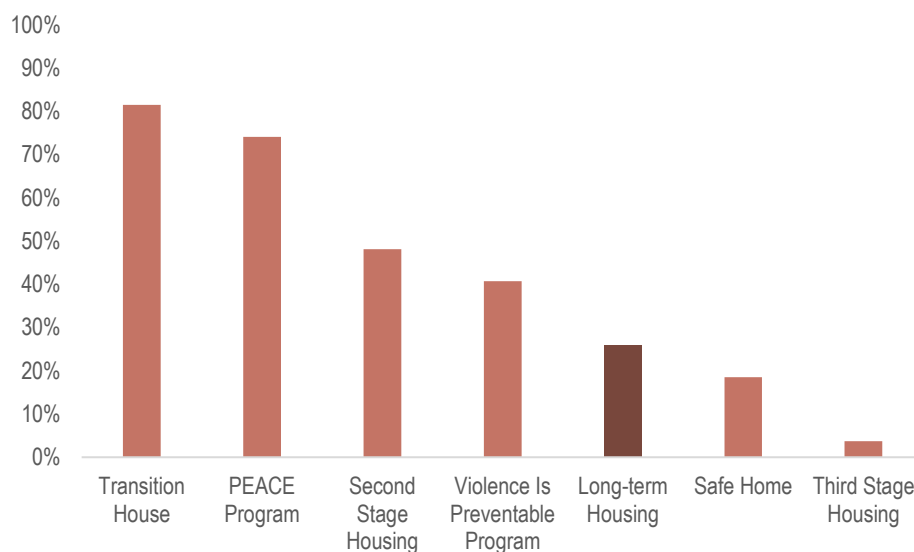


Figure 6: Which of the following programs does your agency provide?

An Evidence Supported Approach to Housing

The current shift in service provision in the anti-violence sector from temporarily sheltering women to providing longer term housing options has arisen out of necessity



but is also a shift that is supported by research. Research in Alberta that included 300 individuals with lived-experiences of homelessness identified that prominent models of “gender-neutral” housing services, including the Housing First model, were based on the needs of cis men experiencing homelessness which has resulted in women who are experiencing homelessness being more vulnerable to violent victimization and physical and mental health concerns (Milaney et al., 2020). The research concludes that “organizations that primarily support women could receive funding to implement housing programs” (p. 5) and that partnerships between existing Housing First programs and women’s organizations should be established to create better housing services for women.

Furthermore, research by Woodhall-Melnik et al. (2017) found that attaining shelter only partially establishes stability for women who have experienced Intimate Partner Violence⁵; the research found that in addition to material security or shelter, women who participated in the study required elements such as safety, comfort and community to feel they had established a stable home. This understanding of home has been long recognized and strived for in the anti-violence sector.

Key Tenets of Women-Centred Housing

In support of evidence that suggests there is a need for gender specific housing services, respondents of the Keys to Home survey and those consulted identified key tenets they believe describe “women-centred” housing. Women-centred housing can be described as follows:

- ◆ Prioritizes women as tenants
- ◆ Trauma- and violence-informed
- ◆ Choice-based
- ◆ Community focused

Prioritizing Women as Tenants

In some cases, BCSTH members described the need for self-identified women only buildings. Others saw the need for all genders having access to women-centred housing while ensuring the housing remains women-centred through policies such as ensuring the woman who had experienced violence is the only name listed on the lease. Prioritizing women as tenants was discussed in terms of priority placement for women and their children who have experienced violence but also in terms of recognizing the

⁵ Language used in source.



gendered differences in the experience of housing precarity and facilitating appropriate support services as a result.

“Women-centred housing means that policies, procedures and operations are created through a women-centred lens through gender analysis.” (Survey Respondent)

Trauma- and Violence-Informed

Trauma- and violence-informed practices were discussed in terms of support services as well as a consideration in housing design. Providing physical safety was noted as a priority through adequate security of the building (cameras, fob-access elevators, etc.) but also through creating a safe community space through the design of common areas and garden or outdoor spaces. Creating safety for residents was also discussed in terms of policies that upheld safe spaces, such as preventing judgement of those accessing the housing that might be using substances. The need for access to support services was also stated, with one respondent describing women-centred housing as ***“housing that has programming in place to support the varying issues women may be dealing with after leaving an abusive partner.”*** Trauma- and violence-informed design was also described as ensuring there is good lighting and clear sightlines throughout the building as well as calming aesthetics.

Choice-based

Related to trauma- and violence-informed practices, the importance of empowering residents to be included in the building’s community and to make choices related to their housing was recognized as important.

“[In women-centred housing] women are given a choice in determining decisions that affect them.” (Survey Respondent)

Addressing other barriers to housing that can limit choice for residents, such as the National Occupancy Standards⁶, was also discussed as a way to provide better housing for women

Member Highlight

One organization consulted their existing Safe Home and Transition Houses residents on the design of their new build. Residents pointed out good lighting and stroller storage but also the importance of having the freedom to decorate their own space and not follow strict “strata-like” rules for décor.

⁶ To learn more about the National Occupancy Standards and how they are a barrier to housing for women who have experienced violence, see BCSTH’s previous research related to the [Getting Home Project](#).



and their dependents. Some respondents pointed out that appropriate larger units with multiple bedrooms for families must be built to allow women to have a choice in where they live. Eliminating other barriers such as restrictive pet policies or inaccessible units for wheelchairs, strollers or other mobility challenges was also discussed as a way to increase choice in housing for women.

Community Based

Many survey respondents spoke about the importance of consultation with the community that would be accessing the housing during the development process in order to determine what services or designs would be most appropriate. Some respondents also discussed the need to include residents' voices in the creation of policies and procedures in order to foster a sense of community among residents. The community surrounding women-centred housing was also discussed and the importance of access to amenities such as childcare, schools, transit, healthcare, and employment was highlighted.

These findings provide us with a vision for women-centred housing that is informed by research among women with lived-experience of housing precarity and violence as well as the expertise provided by anti-violence sector organizations. This gaps analysis identifies key issues that must be addressed in order to support anti-violence organizations to provide the housing they have envisioned and know is desperately needed by women with experiences of violence and housing precarity throughout our province and beyond.

Summary of Findings

Existing Housing

BCSTH members and other anti-violence workers throughout the province have been providing housing to women who have experienced violence in creative and impactful ways for many decades⁷. In recent years, the extreme housing crisis occurring in BC has motivated many organizations to include long-term housing in their mandates in whatever capacity possible. There have been many unique approaches taken by BCSTH members to provide long-term housing to women seeking housing after experiencing violence.

⁷ BCSTH was started in 1978 with 6 members dedicated to providing shelter and support to women and their children fleeing violence and abuse. BC's first five transition houses were located in Coquitlam, Langley, Vancouver, Vernon and Victoria.



In some cases, partnerships have been created with existing housing providers to prioritize the placement of women who have experienced violence in available units, or the organization has purchased or rented units in order to rent them to women seeking housing after leaving a Safe Home, Transition House or Second-Stage unit. Some organizations have secured funding to develop and operate an entirely new build dedicated to housing women who have experienced violence.

Member Highlight

Many BCSTH members spoke to the importance of ensuring safety features are present in the building if partnering with an existing housing provider and educating the housing provider on why additional safety features are necessary for women who have experienced violence.

In order to learn more about the long-term housing BCSTH members provide, the Keys to Home Project Coordinator reached out to BCSTH members to continue the conversation on housing in the anti-violence sector. As mentioned above, the WTHF funding greatly increased the number of BCSTH members providing long-term housing to their communities. Although there are a handful of member organizations that are experienced housing providers, the majority of those consulted for the gaps analysis and the majority of those doing this work are organizations that had received WTHF funding and are in the beginning stages of learning and adapting as a new long-term housing provider.

The WTHF funded a diverse range of projects including long-term housing, Second Stage units, upgrades or expansions to existing Transition Houses or Safe Homes and new builds that have a mix of multiple housing models, such as both Second Stage and long-term housing in the same building. Some organizations were able to secure existing buildings or buildings already in development shortly after receiving funding and have been operating for a number of years. While others have faced a multitude of delays throughout the development and construction of a new build. In the summer of 2022, the first of the new builds funded through the WTHF began to open, with many more to come before the end of the year.

Both the informal interviews and online survey identified that the lack of affordable and appropriate housing in BCSTH member communities was the key reason anti-violence organizations have shifted towards long-term housing provision. No survey respondent identified that the shift was for other reasons, such as organizational growth or an interest in long-term housing provision. However, despite the clear need to provide more housing, respondents identified access to funding as a key challenge to becoming



a long-term housing provider in addition to communications with funders, securing space or land for housing, a lack of capacity within their organizations to expand their mandates to include housing and finding staff for new housing projects. These challenges were identified by

Key Challenges to Becoming a Long-term Housing Provider

- ◆ *Access to funding*
- ◆ *Communication with funders*
- ◆ *Securing space or land for housing*
- ◆ *Lack of capacity within their organizations*
- ◆ *Finding staff for new housing projects*

respondents who were in the process of developing housing or currently operating, as well as those who had not yet secured funding to do so. Additionally, survey respondents identified that in order to add additional services, such as long-term housing, to their mandates, more funding, support from the provincial government and more staff would be key (see Figure 7 below).

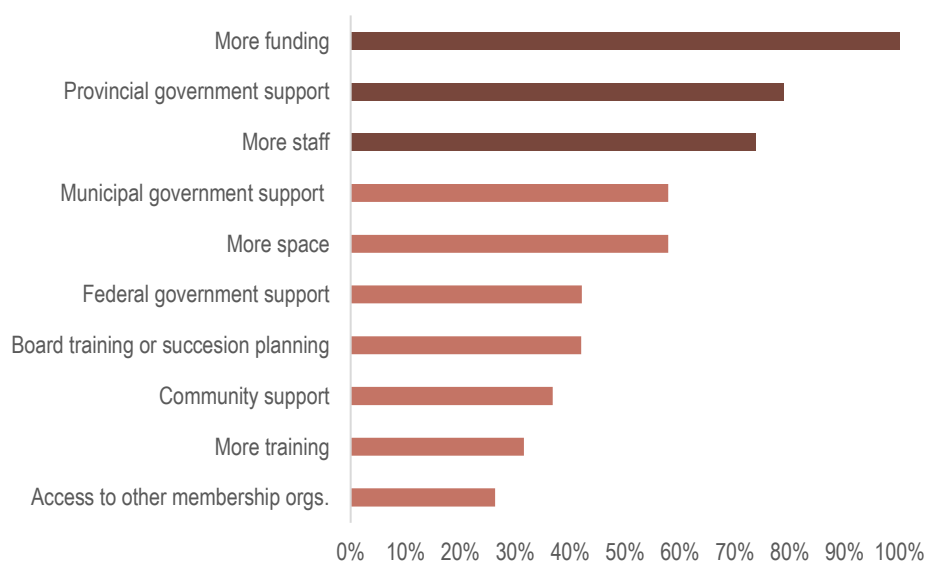


Figure 7: What would your organization require to add additional services to your mandate?

It is clear that the shift towards long-term housing provision by BCSTH members and other anti-violence organizations is one that has been made out of necessity due to the lack of affordable and appropriate housing for the population they serve. Despite the influx of funding and housing projects that came from the WHTF, the sector still remains vastly underfunded and under-resourced. Many organizations consulted with shared that while being able to provide additional housing to their community was important, the impact the additional units would have for women experiencing violence was



minimal because the demand for affordable housing is so high. Furthermore, because so many organizations were already functioning over capacity to provide their existing programming such as Transition House or Safe Home units, there is a dire need to increase capacity in this sector in order to facilitate sustainable housing projects for staff and residents.

Existing Resources and Trainings

In order to make the shift into long-term housing provision, many organizations sought guidance from other organizations that had experience with development or long-term housing provision. This informal collaborative learning approach was the key resource used by those consulted in the informal interviews and the survey. However, many participants in the informal interviews expressed that connections between organizations and support networks could be strengthened, especially for organizations based in remote or isolated areas.

Some organizations did use existing formal resources or training such as BCNPHA's *Ready, Set, Build!* course or the guidelines provided by BC Housing, and a few attended housing conferences or seminars to learn about the sector. However, a common perspective throughout the interviews was a lack of accessible training that provided a simplified overview and guidance on housing development and operation for those new to the sector. It was also clear that the trainings and resources that do exist are underutilized by those in the anti-violence sector. Furthermore, it was expressed that there was a lack of trainings or resources designed specifically for the provision of housing to women who have experienced violence.

The limited engagement with existing trainings is likely due to the lack of capacity and subsequent time to seek these resources out. Many expressed that issues in development or design questions were dealt with as they came up because there was not enough time for planning or preparation for many steps in the development process, such as preparing applications to the municipality for rezoning.

Additional Considerations

In discussions with members, it is clear that the process of developing and operating housing has been a hectic, challenging and time consuming task. The effort and work that BCSTH member organizations have undertaken to realize these housing projects is truly remarkable. Throughout the rush to provide more housing for women who have experienced violence, many members also reflected on big picture questions around the



current approach to housing and the shift into long-term housing provision in the anti-violence sector. There were two prominent discussions of note that came up throughout the informal interviews, the first of which relates to the role of the anti-violence sector in housing and the second relates to the housing continuum.

The Role of the Anti-Violence Sector in the Housing Crisis

A difference of perspectives was shared during the informal interviews over the recent increase in anti-violence organizations providing long-term housing. On the one hand, anti-violence workers have the skills, knowledge and compassion needed to provide a holistic and trauma- and violence-informed approach to services for women who have experienced violence. This skillset is very valuable in housing provision and can be used to decrease barriers to housing for women who have experienced violence. By increasing capacity in the anti-violence sector to provide long-term housing, the result will be more appropriate housing options for those who have experienced violence.

On the other hand, acknowledging that most anti-violence organizations are already functioning over capacity, the need to become housing providers in addition to providing anti-violence services and programs was concerning for most. Without proper funding, resources, training, and support, long-term housing will become an additional burden on an already underfunded and under resourced sector. It is not the obligation of the anti-violence sector to solve the housing crisis in BC. However, if the capacity in the anti-violence sector can be increased, organizations have invaluable knowledge that will improve the quality of housing options available to women who have experienced violence and their children.

The survey asked “If there was enough adequate, affordable and appropriate housing in your community, would your organization still have an interest in providing long-term housing?” to which 74% of respondents replied “yes”. In their reasoning, many could not picture a BC where there was adequate, affordable and appropriate housing for all their clients. Many others felt that even with housing available to their clients, there would still be the need for trauma- and violence-informed, women-centred housing or women-only housing and anti-violence organizations have the knowledge and skillset to provide this.

“I think we would, because there's always the opportunity to do community-based anti-violence programming with residents.” (Survey Respondent)

“We provide women-only housing, and there would likely still be women who would want to live in an environment where they can connect with other women who are single mothers and access resources.” (Survey Respondent)



So, even though the key reason why anti-violence organizations have expanded their mandates to include long-term housing is out of necessity due to the housing crisis, many still see value in the anti-violence sector adapting to this new role because it will result in better housing options for women.

The Role of Second Stage Housing in the Housing Crisis

The second discussion of note was related to the housing continuum, specifically, the value of the Second Stage model within the context of a housing crisis. The Second Stage model is relatively unique to BC but has increasing prominence in other provinces in recent years. Second Stage housing is often a necessary bridge between short term and emergency housing services and long-term, permanent housing including social housing, the private rental market or co-operative housing.

It is important to note that the housing continuum is not linear. Often women seeking housing move back and forth along the continuum based on their circumstances. Finding housing can also be dependent on where space is available. Finding long-term housing is a difficult task during a housing crisis and the waitlists for social housing often far exceed the ideal lengths of stay in short term options such as Safe Homes and Transition Houses. As such, Second Stage housing can provide a much needed buffer for women seeking housing and since the model also removes many barriers to other models of housing such as additional costs for Wi-Fi, damage deposits or pet restrictions, it is more financially accessible. And as a result, women have the time and space needed to find long-term housing options and continue to access support services for themselves and their children if they choose to.

Evidence suggests that the likelihood for securing long-term housing is higher for women departing Second Stage housing compared to Transition Houses. In BC, it is estimated that only 25% of women departing Transition Houses leave to permanent housing, and only 4% of those women leave for affordable permanent housing (BC Society of Transition Houses, 2020). Comparatively, it is estimated that 73% of women left Second Stage housing for permanent housing across BC in 2020 (BC Housing, 2021).

However, the concern was raised by some throughout the informal interviews that long-term housing units should be prioritized over Second Stage units because the need for permanent housing options is so dire. Ideally, both models would be funded adequately and those seeking housing would have options to find housing in the model that is most suited to their needs. But, in the current environment, some of the individuals who were



consulted questioned whether Second Stage could be contributing to the bottleneck in anti-violence services because women staying in Second Stage units still need to relocate to often non-existent permanent housing at some point. Although this discussion cannot be fully explored through the Keys to Home project, it is important to consider for developing training and resources for organizations doing this work and contemplating these big questions that can inform their preferred approach to the development of housing.

Identification of Major Gaps

Resulting from the informal interviews and online survey were three common areas where the gaps in knowledge, resources and training were clearest:

- ◆ Housing development education
- ◆ Diversification of housing models
- ◆ Operational policies and procedures

Housing Development Education

It was stated over and over again by participants that there are no available guidelines that provide an overview of housing development from project conceptualization to opening the doors. Although, there are trainings and tool-kits available to the community housing sector that attempt to provide this overview⁸, it was clear that our members had not found them accessible evidenced by their lack of engagement with these resources. There are many considerations that must be made when providing housing to women who have experienced violence; as such there is a need for development resources that are inclusive of these needs.

For those of our members who had sought out existing development resources, there were three main points of feedback:

- ◆ Many existing resources or trainings require a commitment of time that many felt they could not accommodate due to the demanding nature of their daily work.
- ◆ Resources are not specific to housing women who have experienced violence and there is a lack of insights on developing trauma- and violence-informed, women-centred housing.

⁸ *Ready, Set, Build!* is a three day training provided by BC Non-Profit Housing Association. BCNPHA also provides a course on new construction and redevelopment and the Sustainable Housing Initiative in Alberta provides a *Step-by-Step Guide to Developing Affordable Housing* (Rural Development Network, 2019).



- ◆ There is a focus on development in urban areas in many existing resources and those in rural areas felt the suggestions for development were not applicable in their communities.

A key area of interest for many was further education, resources or support for building municipal partnerships when developing and guidance on issues such as rezoning applications to the city. This is an area that our members felt they were underprepared for and would have benefited from an overview of the process. Interestingly, the issue of NIMBYism (“Not In My Back Yard”) was not highlighted as an area that further support was needed as BCSTH members that were consulted were confident in community engagement to educate surrounding neighbourhoods on the importance of their work and presence. However, as accounts of resistance from communities concerning new builds were discussed, the Keys to Home curriculum will include useful resources around NIMBYism to ensure that members have the responsive tools they need.

Member Highlight

BCSTH members discussed the importance of being loud and visible in the community. Provide connection and education on the importance of anti-violence work and form a relationship with the municipality as early as possible when considering a new build.

Another area that our members felt could be strengthened is education on the importance of women-centred design for developers and within the community housing sector. For those working with BC Housing’s Women’s Transitional Housing and Supports Program, BCSTH members shared very positive experiences during the development phase and felt they were supported in requests to make the design of the building appropriate for women experiencing violence (e.g., including additional safety features of common areas). However, many shared that it was difficult to explain the need for these features to other BC Housing Departments and this affected the end result of the design in some cases.

Diversification of Housing Models

Of the projects currently in development or operation through the WTHF that include long-term housing, all will operate under the landlord/tenant model of housing. Respondents to the survey indicated low interest in alternative housing models such as co-operative housing. When asked “what models of housing are most appealing to your organization?” respondents indicated all options that were preferable to them, with 84% selecting affordable housing, 74% selecting supportive housing, 63% selecting mixed-



rental housing, but only 32% selecting co-operative housing (see Figure 8 below). As determined through previous research by BCSTH in the Getting Home Project, co-operative housing has fostered discrimination against women who have experienced violence⁹ and their families, despite the potential the co-operative housing model has to create more community-focused living than the landlord/tenant model often results in (Knowles et al., 2019).

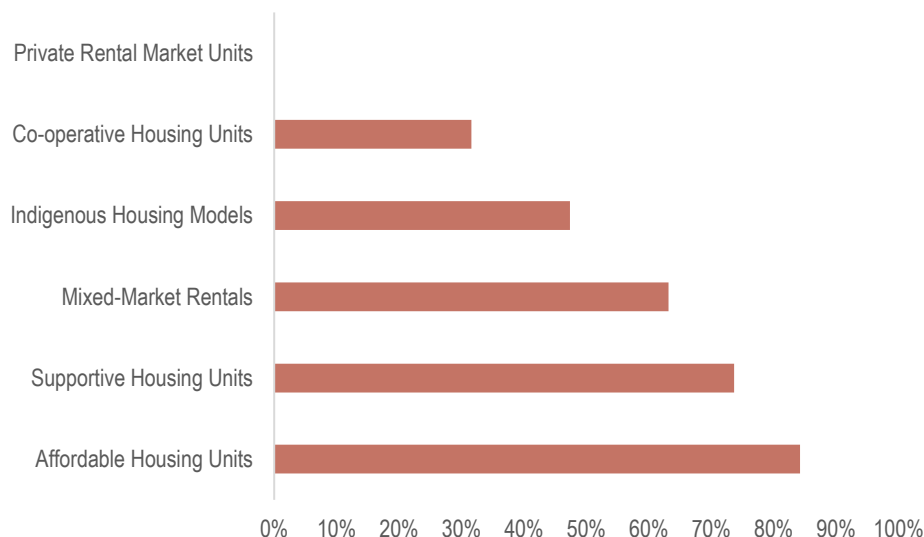


Figure 8: What models of housing are most appealing to your organization?

Furthermore, the interest in providing Indigenous housing models was moderate, with slightly under half of respondents (47%) indicating interest. The Getting Home Project and research by Schwann et al. (2020) and Maki (2019) identify that Indigenous women are over represented both in their experiences of violence and housing precarity when compared to non-Indigenous women in Canada. Indigenous women also face higher levels of discrimination when seeking housing in the private rental market (Martin & Walia, 2019). As of 2019, 80% of anti-violence organizations identified that Indigenous women use their services, but only 19% provide culturally-specific services for Indigenous women.

Some members who were consulted also identified that there is a lack of resources and trainings for providing housing to women with complex care needs including mental wellness and women who use substances. One member identified that through their

⁹ Historically, co-operative housing communities have been known to resist resident applications from women who have experienced violence in an effort to prevent them from “bringing violence” into their communities (Knowles et al., 2019).



organization's tenant selection process they try to identify applicants that would be a good fit for the building's community and those that have needs that can be well supported by the staff. However, this often results that those with complex care needs go without housing as there is no alternative housing available in their community for women who have experienced violence and have complex care needs. Overall, due to underfunding, the anti-violence sector has limited options for the type of long-term housing they can provide and the populations they can house. Housing for women who have experienced violence must be culturally safe and provide adequate care for those with complex needs. Due to intersecting systems of power, women's experiences of violence, cultural identities, relationships with substances, and mental health are often interrelated and cannot be separated. Women-centred housing must provide a safe space and home for all aspects of an individual to heal and thrive.

As noted above, all long-term housing projects funded through the WTHF will operate under the landlord/tenant model. Transition House, Second Stage and Third Stage House program agreements for residents do not function under the *Residential Tenancy Act* (RTA) that informs long-term rentals throughout BC. As a result, our members that have no previous experience with providing long-term housing are required to learn the rules and regulations under the RTA. One significant challenge is redefining the traditional relationship between a program facilitator and program participant relationship to one of a landlord and tenant relationship. Different to program agreements that can be managed by each organization, landlord and tenant agreements (and disputes) are managed through the *Residential Tenancy Branch* (RTB). Many BCSTH members highlighted the importance of understanding how the RTB functions but pointed out that consulting a tenancy lawyer to understand the RTA and RTB is unaffordable for most organizations.

Furthermore, learning how to provide housing under the RTA while also applying a women-centred lens to housing provision is a difficult task. Although the RTA provides necessary tenant rights, the landlord/tenant model has inherent power dynamics that are often paternalistic and contrary to an intersectional feminist approach to service delivery. In their exploration of realizing the right to housing, Madden and Marcuse (2016) argue that a necessary step is to "let a thousand housing alternatives bloom" (p.134). Although it is efficient to recreate the model of housing that is most common in our society, the landlord/tenant model might not be conducive to creating truly accessible and appropriate housing for women who have experienced violence. Anti-



violence organizations should be allowed the necessary funding and capacity to create housing within a model that is the most beneficial to their communities.

Operational Policies and Procedures

Even for housing operating under the RTA, each housing provider must determine their organization's individual policies and procedures for operation. As stated previously, the shift from a program agreement to a landlord/tenant relationship is significant. Although many in the VAW sector have expertise in temporarily sheltering women who have experienced violence, there is limited experience in providing housing to an individual for potentially decades or the rest of their life. Among survey respondents with experience in developing or operating long-term housing, 70% identified creating operational policies as a challenge. However, among survey respondents with no experience in long-term housing, only 15% identified creating operational policies as a perceived challenge of long-term housing provision. During informal interviews, those consulted identified that creating operational policies and procedures was more complex than they had initially assumed and guidance on this area would be of benefit to the sector.

Major operational policy areas identified included gender inclusivity, tenant selection, rent collections, guests, and pets. For many of these areas, those consulted shared that best practices in each area from a trauma- and violence-informed and women-centred approach would be helpful. For issues such as gender inclusivity, there were many questions and differing approaches on how to design policies and procedures to keep their buildings women only, if they so choose to enforce this. Some members felt that it is important to provide women only long-term housing to respect the safety and comfort of women who have experienced violence, whereas others saw value to having men living in the building, primarily for children.

Some thought having men in the building could provide children with positive male role models and healthy relationship modelling for those in heterosexual relationships. It is clear that this is one area that would benefit from further research, resources and training, especially considering that many anti-violence organizations strive to be inclusive and safe for trans and non-binary people who have experienced violence. As such, support is

Member Highlight

Some organizations highlighted their practice of ensuring the name of the woman who has experienced violence is the only name on the lease if she is living with a partner or family member to ensure she is entitled to her housing should the relationship end.



needed to create organizational policies and procedures for their long-term housing that uphold and respect the safety and comfort of all to the best of their abilities.

Systemic Gaps

In addition to identifying common areas that require more resources and training, it was clear that many of the issues discussed were dependent on larger, systemic issues including the overall capacity issues in the sector as well as persistent underfunding.

Lack of Capacity

As previously discussed, the goal of the Keys to Home project is to increase capacity in the anti-violence sector (through resources and training) to provide housing to women with experiences of violence. Throughout the informal interviews and survey, members discussed how this current lack of capacity affects their work. Many of the issues BCSTH members face arise due to a lack of organizational capacity because of the constant demand for the services they provide while being under resourced.

Specifically, staffing is a primary issue facing the sector for a multitude of reasons. Firstly, being a frontline worker in the anti-violence sector is incredibly hard work and rates of burnout and staff turnover are high; this issue was only made worse throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (Women's Shelters Canada, 2020).

Because the sector is underfunded, anti-violence sector workers are often not adequately compensated for the important and sometimes life-saving work that they do. Organizations often do not have enough operational funding to hire the appropriate amount of staff needed to manage the workload. Furthermore, staff of anti-violence organizations face the same barriers to housing that many of their clients do. As many of the informal interviewees pointed out, staff often have to move away from their community for housing, or the age demographic that usually work as frontline workers seek work in other sectors that have higher compensation so they can afford to remain in their communities.

Many interviewees shared that the lack of staff creates a reliance on Executive Directors of organizations to manage and carry out new housing projects on top of their existing work. Furthermore, because additional funding to staff new housing projects often is only available once a building is operational, there is little time to find staff and train them prior to housing residents, which participants felt led to their organization feeling unprepared to open their housing project. This lack of capacity can be understood as the foundation for many of the gaps identified above. With limited staff, there is little time to seek out resources for development, attend trainings, research



alternative housing models and create holistic, women-centred operational policies and procedures.

Funding

Furthermore, the foundation for this lack of capacity in the VAW sector is the overall lack of adequate funding of the sector. Many consulted pointed out that any additional resources and time their organization has often goes towards securing more funding through grant applications or fundraising. Many stated that securing funding is worthy of its own full-time position because of the amount of time required.

As for securing funding for long-term housing, respondents to the survey that had experience in long-term housing were mostly in the development phase with a few respondents indicating that they had more than 10 years of experience in providing long-term housing to women experiencing violence. The majority of housing projects were funded by BC Housing followed by municipal government funding and a handful receiving CMHC funding (see Figure 9 and Figure 10 below). Therefore, the experiences captured by the survey are heavily informed by those in the beginning stages of housing provision and working with BC Housing as their funder.

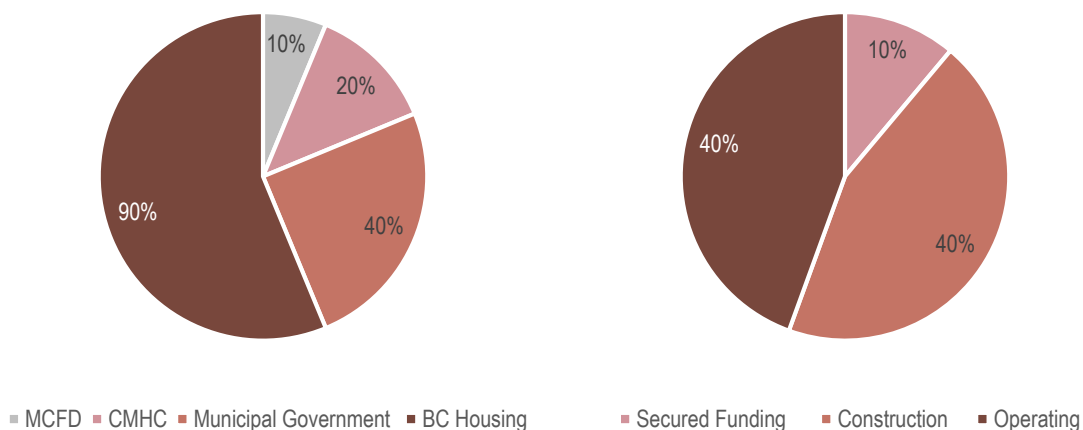


Figure 9: Who is the funder for your most recent housing project?

Figure 10: What stage of development is your most recent long-term housing project in?

Many shared that their experiences with BC Housing as a funder varied based on the department they were interacting with and that communication between departments often hindered the projects' progress. Those consulted in the informal interviews had very positive experiences working with the WTHF and felt the funding stream worked



well because there was a team solely dedicated to developing housing for women who had experienced violence that had expertise in this area. However, some members did share their frustrations that their projects had been given “green light” status since the application period for the funding had closed four years ago and have still not began development of their project due to delays from the funder.

Beyond BC Housing, our members shared that funding streams that identify the need for “shovel-ready” projects in the application are not accessible to the anti-violence sector, as most organizations require funding to become shovel-ready. Furthermore, our members shared that although the province has placed a focus on increasing long-term housing options, it is important for funders to let the community and applying organization decide what type of housing is most needed for the population they serve. For example, some shared their preference for an increase in Second Stage units over long-term units. Survey respondents identified the amount of funding available and issues with funding applications as key challenges to securing funding for long-term housing projects (see Figure 11 below).

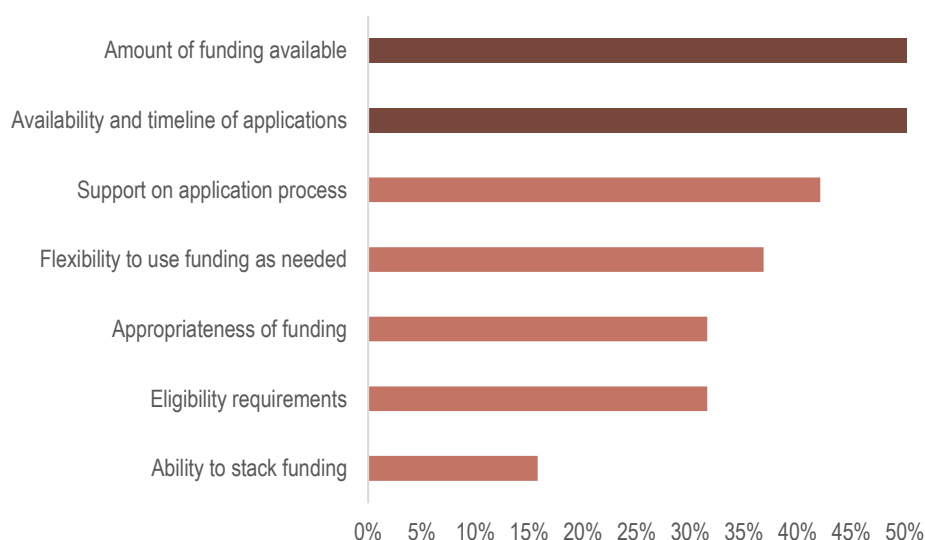


Figure 11: What are the key challenges to securing funding for new housing projects?



Recommendations

Now that we have established the vision and goals of the anti-violence sector for long-term housing provision that is women-centred, as well as the current gaps in resources and training that is limiting the continued growth of this sector into long-term housing, we can begin to understand the next steps to address the identified gaps. Overall, **continued advocacy to increase funding and resources** for the anti-violence sector is fundamental to strengthening existing VAW services and increasing the capacity of organizations to expand into housing options. Steps should be taken by funders to limit barriers to accessing funding for anti-violence organizations, including limiting funding streams that require shovel-ready projects. A key resource used by organizations in the process of housing development was the relationships and connections with other organizations with experience in development or housing. These **connections should be strengthened** through formal mentorship programs or increasing partnerships between anti-violence organizations and housing organizations. Efforts to direct anti-violence organizations to existing housing and development training and resources would also be beneficial.

Additional trainings should be developed that address key gaps identified by this analysis, such as the need for support with creating operational policies and procedures, development resources that are useful to rural and remote communities and are accessible to those who are new to the housing sector, as well as guides for women-centred housing provision. To uphold many of the tenants of women-centred housing identified in this research, there is also a need for **education on the RTA and RTB but also on alternative housing models beyond the landlord/tenant model**. Support is needed to identify best practices for providing housing under a landlord/tenant model that upholds a women-centred and feminist approach, as the two are often at odds with one another. Co-operative housing and Indigenous models of housing provision have the potential to sustain the importance of choice-based and community focused housing identified by BCSTH members. However, within the current context, there is a lack of time and staff in anti-violence organizations available to explore alternative models.

Furthermore, although more than half of survey respondents (58%) indicated that building and operating a new build would be the most appealing circumstances for their organization to provide long-term housing, there is **additional support needed for those who can provide long-term housing through alternative approaches**. Given known capacity issues and limited funding for new builds, more support and resources



are needed for organizations that become housing providers by partnering with existing housing providers, rent units from existing buildings or those that do not have capacity to provide housing but want to become advocates for women-centred housing in their communities.

Summary of Recommendations

- ◆ *Continued advocacy for increased funding*
- ◆ *Mentorship programs or partnership building*
- ◆ *Support with creating operational policies and procedures*
- ◆ *Introductory development resources that are useful to rural and remote communities*
- ◆ *Guides for women-centered housing provision*
- ◆ *Education on the Residential Tenancy Act as well as alternative housing models*
- ◆ *Support for all approaches to increasing access to housing, not only new build*

Conclusion

It is clear that more support is needed for anti-violence organizations embarking on expanding their mandates to include long-term housing provision. Women and their children who have experienced violence and at risk of violence should not have to remain in violent homes or become homeless due to the inadequate housing options in their communities. Furthermore, anti-violence services must be accessible and not tasked with the difficult job of turning away a family in need due to limited space.

Although there is much to learn from existing resources and trainings developed by the community housing sector, the knowledge and expertise of anti-violence workers is also essential to improving the province's overall housing quality. Although a women-centred approach is needed to limit barriers to housing for women who have experienced violence, the key tenets of women-centred housing are beneficial to the entire housing stock and all of those in British Columbia seeking housing. Partnership and creativity between the anti-violence and community housing sectors is necessary to provide the high quality and affordable housing BC desperately needs.

Next steps for the Keys to Home project will include continued advocacy for anti-violence organizations providing long-term housing and the development of a curriculum and tool-kit that will inform this work and strengthen a framework for women-centred housing in our province that will be applicable to all housing providers.



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