

A Gender Lens on Homelessness: Lessons from YWCA Toronto

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TORONTO

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FOR WOMEN



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Outline

- 1) Who We Are: YWCA Movement
- 2) The Issue: Gender and Homelessness
- 3) Solution: Multipronged, Safety First Approach
- 4) National Housing Strategy: Call to Action!

A Note on Gender

- When we use the term women, we are using it in an inclusive manner and are mindful of the diverse and intersecting identities of the people who access our services.



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WHO WE ARE



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YWCA – Local – National - Global

- 32 member Associations in 9 provinces and 2 territories
- Toronto - Housing provider since 1870
- Deep roots in the country's advocacy to eradicate gender based violence- offering services to approximately 20,000 women every year across the country
- Largest women's shelter provider in the country.

YWCA Toronto

- We shelter and house almost 1,700 women and children annually.
- Our housing portfolio includes 62 emergency shelter beds (additional 50 beds by December) for homeless single women, 61 Violence Against Women beds at two sites, a 12 bed transitional housing project, and 547 units of supportive, permanent housing.
- Strong advocacy for affordable housing



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The challenge



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Gender & Homelessness

- Failing to include a gender lens to inform our discussions, and solutions, to homelessness ignores the realities, needs and interests of women – with harmful consequences for women and their families.
- Differential impact of homelessness across the gender continuum.
 - Often not considered by policy shapers



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Hidden Homelessness

WHEN YOU PICTURE A HOMELESS PERSON
DO YOU SEE A WOMAN?

LOOK AGAIN



11,000

girls and young women
16-24 years of age use
homeless shelters

63%

use shelters for
abused women

37%

use homeless shelters

Sources: Saegert, The National Shelter Study: Emergency Shelter Use in Canada 2005-2009, 2012. Gaetz, Donaldson, Richter & Gulliver, The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013. Statistics Canada, Residents of Canada's Shelters for Abused women, 2010.

H4W TPE
Homes for women Toits pour elles
www.homesforwomen.ca

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Inclusion of Women

- Violence plays a central role in shaping the pathways into homelessness for women and girls.
- Women's homelessness is less visible than that of men.
- Women are more vulnerable to violence once homeless.
- Particular implications for Housing First Models



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Violence Against Women Data

- Domestic violence is the immediate cause of homelessness for many women and children (30%-60% according to different US/Canadian studies).
- Homeless women and girls rate of domestic violence and childhood abuse are significant (60%; 90% for homeless mothers).
- Women and girls living on streets experience high levels of physical and sexual violence (37% Toronto sample).



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Differential pathways

How do we consider the barriers and pathways to:

- Economic sustainability
- Mental health
- Employment stability



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Intersectionality of pathways

- Race
- Culture
- Immigration/refugee status
- Indigeneity
- Age
- gender

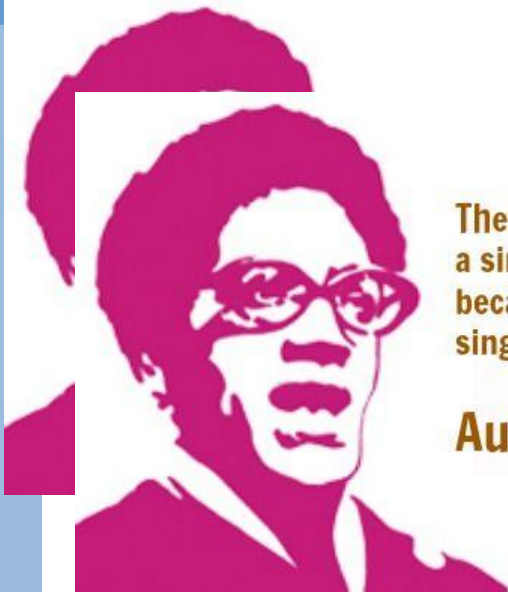


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There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.

Audre Lorde

To be effective, a Housing Policy at any level of government or community requires an intersectional gender-based analysis, by incorporating factors such as race, age, education, language, culture, disability, sexual orientation, Indigeneity, gender identity and income.



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COUNT WOMEN AND GIRLS IN TO A NATIONAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING STRATEGY

ACCESS TO HOUSING AND EXPERIENCES OF HOMELESSNESS DIFFER ON THE BASIS OF GENDER.

WOMEN ARE MORE LIKELY TO:

▶ LIVE ON LOW INCOMES



70% OF PART-TIME WORKERS
60% OF MINIMUM WAGE WORKERS

▶ LIVE TO OLD AGE



72% OF OVER 90 ARE WOMEN
28% OF SENIOR WOMEN LIVE IN POVERTY

▶ LIVE WITH CHILDREN



79% OF SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES LED BY WOMEN
OVER **50%** OF WOMEN ARRIVE TO SHELTERS WITH CHILDREN

▶ LOSE HOUSING ^{DUE TO} VIOLENCE

8,000 WOMEN & CHILDREN IN SHELTERS ON A SINGLE NIGHT



78% IN SHELTER DUE TO **VIOLENCE**

A SAFE HOME IS A HUMAN RIGHT. COUNT WOMEN AND GIRLS IN.

Source: Count Women and Girls In to the National Housing Strategy, YWCA Canada's Homes for Women, 2016.



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UN POINT TOURNANT
POUR LES FEMMES

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www.homesforwomen.ca

Gender consideration

- Poverty and the lack of affordable housing are critical components of homelessness.
- All housing strategies must consider:
 - Income support programs
 - Minimum wage policies/basic income
 - Effective race policies
 - Generations of affordable housing stock
 - Greater supports for mental health and addiction
 - Measurable response to truth and reconciliation

Safety First Approach

- Safety of women and girls must be a guiding consideration of any housing model:
 - Is safety better secured through congregate or scattered housing?
 - Is housing located where women will be safe from abusive partners or predators?
 - Are public and private landlords participating in model trained on violence against women?
 - Mental health consideration



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Creating an Inclusive Strategy



Responding to women's demographics:

- Increase affordable housing for low-income women
- Increase access to affordable childcare
- Include innovative affordable housing dedicated to senior women
- Expand gender-specific, trauma informed programs & services
- Include a self-determined Aboriginal housing strategy
- Expand access to services for women with disabilities



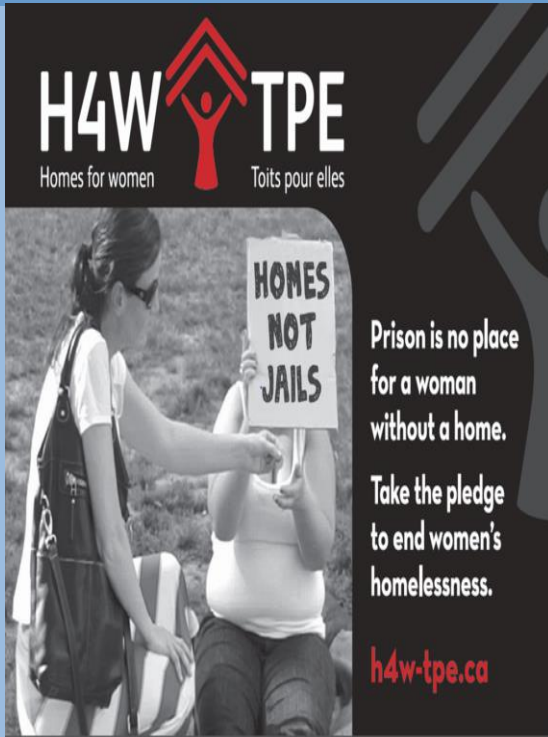
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Develop Homes, Not Prisons



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HOMES NOT JAILS

Prison is no place for a woman without a home.
Take the pledge to end women's homelessness.

h4w-tpe.ca

- It is essential to ensure long-term federal investment in supportive housing for First Nation, Metis and Inuit women, Black and racialized women, survivors of violence and women using substances.
- 87% of all imprisoned women have histories of physical and/or sexual abuse.
- Most women in prison pose little to no risk to public safety.

Supportive Housing

- How do we understand support and the appropriate levels of support
- As part of the solution to homelessness, it is necessary to invest in housing! Including
 - Supportive housing for young mothers
 - Respectful understanding of indigenous families
 - Supportive housing for women coping with wellness



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National Housing Strategy – moving from strategy to community reality



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About NHS

- Mix of federal investment of funding, loans and land, plus potential matching funds and other investments from provinces and territories.
- Includes a gender-lens with 25 % of funds slated to flow directly to projects and services for women, girls, and their families.



Moving past Strategy

- Requires advocacy at all levels of government
- Action at the municipal level
- Getting on the municipal agenda
- Speaking to budget briefs
- Empower people with lived experience to “take the mic”



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Advocacy in the Context of NHS

- NHS recognizes the need for women-only housing but what will implementation of NHS look like at the municipal level?
- We need to be advocates in our respective municipalities to ensure NHS \$ is not misdirected.
- How will you ensure the diverse needs of homeless and precariously housed women and girls are central in housing plans in your city or town?



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Lived Experience as Policy Expertise

- Women's lived experiences of homelessness and insecure housing provide invaluable information about the actual impacts of policies and programs.
- Policies and programs developed and implemented without input from those directly affected often prove ineffective or inadvertently harmful.
- Women experiencing homelessness should play a central role in every aspect of the implementation of the NHS.



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Housing as a Right

- A human rights-based approach is necessary for the development of a national housing policy
- Housing, homelessness and safety from violence are interconnected for women and girls
- A safe home is essential to achieving security of the person guaranteed in Section 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom



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Genuine Commitment to Gender Equity

- “to be taken seriously in central, mainstream, “normal” institutional activities and not simply left in a marginalized, peripheral backwater of specialist women’s institutions”

Hilary Charlesworth

Thank you

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