

# 2020 SHELTER SNAPSHOT



Six-month snapshot of shelter experiences during COVID-19  
April 1, 2020 – September 30, 2020<sup>1</sup>

## What we've Learned

1- “Stay home, stay safe” isn’t always true for those living in violence and abuse at home.

In addition to carrying the stress load that all of us are carrying during the pandemic, women living in violence and abuse during Covid-19 are:

- increasingly isolated
- often expected to flex their work more than other family members, particularly as parents of young children – which could result in additional financial stress and dependency on the abuser
- increasingly under the scrutiny and control of perpetrators
- reluctant to move to shelters due to public messaging about staying home, concerns over communal living; and
- Trying to keep the peace – until the abuse reaches a level where they feel their lives are in danger or the lives of their children are in danger.

**Despite the barriers COVID-19 posed for domestic violence shelters across the province, from April 1 – September 30, 2020, domestic violence shelters remained open and continued to support communities.**

- 2,725 women, children, and seniors were admitted to emergency shelters across the province
- 300 of women and children were admitted to second-stage shelters
- 1,792 women, children, and seniors accessed outreach services from shelters
- Shelters received 21,744 calls, with 7,241 of those being for crisis support.

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<sup>1</sup> ACWS Data for December 2020 Information Release

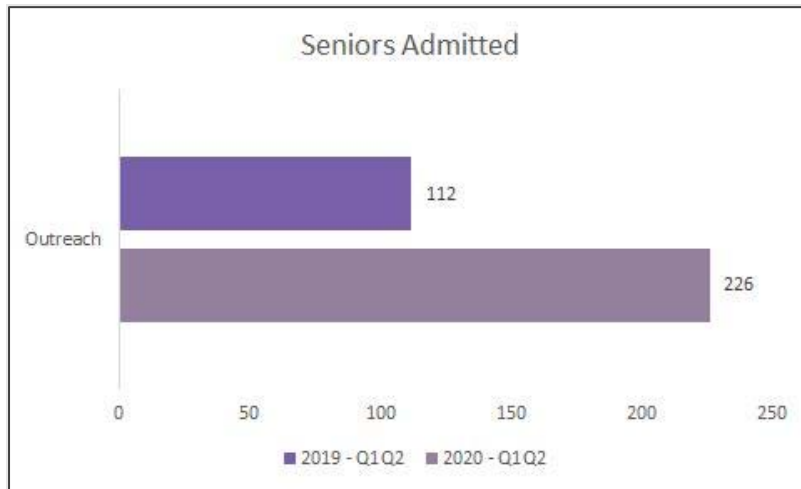
A continued high demand for shelter services (even with reduced capacity in some communities), is evident given that shelters are still having to turn away people:

**Emergency Shelters: Number of Turn-aways<sup>2</sup>**

Q1Q2 - 2019	Q1Q2 - 2020
9664	6029

**Second-Stage Shelters: Number of Turn-aways**

Q1Q2 - 2019	Q1Q2 - 2020
341	270



*The increased health risks of COVID-19 for older adults could be deterring seniors from accessing residential shelter services. The fear of risking COVID-19 may be due to why more seniors are accessing outreach services during 2020 in comparison to 2019.*

**Why shelter numbers are down**

Across the province, ACWS members have seen a decrease in the number of women coming to shelters and describe the pandemic as an additional barrier, preventing some women experiencing domestic violence to access support from shelters because:

- Despite public messaging about the measures that shelters have taken to be as safe as possible, women may be fearful about catching the virus in the shelter, and are concerned about a potential lock down;
- Many women are not able to call for help or safely leave their homes, since their abusive partners are always there, with more people working from home or unemployed;
- Many shelters have had to reduce the available number of spaces to comply or exceed public health recommendations and

<sup>2</sup> Turn-away data includes 37 shelters in 2019 and 38 shelters in 2020. Shelters do their best to connect anyone who may be turned away due to lack of capacity with other service providers.

- Dynamics of abuse often include isolation, and the pandemic has increased isolation and restrictions at many levels – including the public health requirements that shelters must follow.

In addition to the reduction in the number of women seeking shelter access due to COVID-19, the availability of shelter spaces is also down in some communities as a result of physical distancing requirements and how a given shelter was structured.

Some emergency shelters could only achieve safe distancing and sanitizing by limiting one family per bathroom and thereby reducing the total number of families they could safely accept. Shelter capacity has also been limited due to public health orders, mandatory isolation and quarantine affecting shelter staff, making it difficult for shelters to support and accommodate the same number of families they did prior to the pandemic.

### Emergency Shelter - Residential Admissions<sup>3</sup>

Data Point	Q1Q2 - 2019	Q1Q2 – 2020
Women Admitted	2878	1563
Children Admitted	2145	1132
Seniors Admitted	38	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>5061</b>	<b>2725</b>

### Second-Stage Shelter - Residential Admissions

Data Point	Q1Q2 - 2019	Q1Q2 – 2020
Women admitted	125	101
Children admitted	198	199
<b>Total</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>300</b>

While calls and admissions to women’s shelters across the province are down in comparison to the same 6-month timeframe the year before, this does not mean domestic violence rates have decreased.

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<sup>3</sup> Admission data (Emergency and Second-Stage) includes 37 shelters in 2019 and 38 shelters in 2020.

## 2- Women’s experiences of domestic violence are severe.

### Domestic violence calls to police have increased across the province.

- The RCMP saw an 11.7% increase of domestic violence calls from March to September, 2020 compared to 2019<sup>4</sup>.
- The Edmonton Police Service saw a 16% increase from January to November, 2020 in comparison to the same time period in 2019<sup>5</sup>.
- The Calgary Police Service reports that they have responded to 9% more domestic violence incidents in comparison to average but 10% less calls involving threatened/actual violence between January and September of 2020<sup>6</sup>.

ACWS data shows increased severity in Danger Assessment scores (a tool that assesses the severity of violence and a woman’s risk of homicide) for second-stage shelters, and sustained levels of severity in Danger Assessment (DA) scores with emergency shelter clients.

A Danger Assessment score of 14-17 indicates “Severe Danger” and a score 18+ indicates “Extreme Danger”

Average DA Score-Shelter Type <sup>7</sup>	Q1Q2 - 2019	Q1Q2 – 2020
Emergency Average DA	18.0	17.6
Second-Stage Average DA	17.5	21.3

“Staff have shared that in the last few months, they’re really noticing a lot of women that were scheduled to move into a second-stage unit, but then are cancelling at the last minute. The sense is that women may be under increased scrutiny and living in danger and can’t leave – though they may want to.” - Shelter Executive Director

<sup>4</sup> St-Onge, J. (2020, October,13). Domestic Violence calls to police on rise during pandemic, yet some Alberta shelters have been quiet. CBC News

<sup>5</sup> Ryan, S. (2020, November, 5). Domestic violence ‘shadow pandemic’ on the rise in Edmonton. Global News.

<sup>6</sup> Kost, H. (2020, November, 2). Calgary experiencing ‘shadow pandemic’ of domestic violence, experts say. CBC News.

<sup>7</sup> Danger Assessment data includes 32 shelters

### 3- Shelters are at the heart of keeping survivors safe in community and are needed now more than ever.

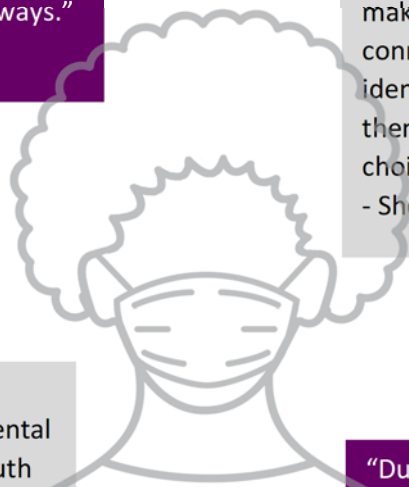
- Shelters collaborate: locally, provincially, nationally and globally to offer the best for seniors, women and their children fleeing violence and abuse.
- More than ever before, shelters do what it takes to keep Albertans alive and wear many hats in their communities.
- A day in the life of each shelter is unique and many shelters are the sole service provider in their community, serving people with a diverse array of social service challenges.

“Other community agencies have reduced services and locked doors due to Covid. Women struggling with addictions and/or mental health have less supports, less places to go for help-- so they end up at our door. We are not able to help those with extreme addiction or mental health issues, resulting in more turn-aways.”  
- Shelter Executive Director

“Often there is a deep sense of loneliness or aloneness that accompanies leaving a relationship - even an abusive one. This is topped with the logistical and economic complications that most women face. The simple presence of checking in, making time, supporting, and connecting with our clients has been identified as something that brings them back toward life-affirming choices and attitudes.”  
- Shelter Executive Director

“Our shelter also facilitates the local youth centre, providing a non-judgmental and accepting environment for all youth to feel safe both physically and emotionally. We evaluated this program as part of ACWS’s Steve Patty evaluation training and found that 89% of the youth who access their services agree that they feel more comfortable being themselves because of the youth centre.”  
- Shelter Executive Director

“During our shelter’s evaluation of our programs through ACWS’s Steve Patty evaluation training, we found that in addition to helping keep women and children safe from abusers, our services are also a form of suicide prevention and intervention.”  
- Shelter Executive Director



## WHAT THE PUBLIC NEEDS TO KNOW

### 4- Shelters remain open and are preparing for spike in demand

Shelters continue to serve women, children and seniors during the COVID-19 pandemic – in 6 months, 12,058 Albertans were served through residential, outreach or crisis calls. The experiences of other jurisdictions have taught us that when distancing requirements are removed, the demand for shelter services goes up – **potentially for years after.**

### 5) Women’s shelters remain the safest place for a woman fleeing violence.

Shelters are adapting their services to meet the physical distancing, disinfecting, and isolation requirements by public health officials so they can continue to meet the safety needs of the women, children, and seniors in their communities who rely on their services.

### 6) Shelters are more than a bed.

Our members are trained to help women assess their danger levels and create safety plans. We encourage anyone experiencing violence or abuse to call their local women’s shelter. They have counsellors at the ready, and they will work to support your safety in person or over the phone. Call 1-866-331-3933 to be connected to a women’s shelter.

## HOW YOU CAN ENHANCE SAFETY

### 7) If possible, donate to your local shelter

COVID-19 caused a significant reduction in fundraised dollars because of the increased competition for charitable donations as non-profits try to address the increased costs resulting from creating safety during COVID-19. as well as restrictions that prohibit in-person fundraising activities, open doors to allow for walk-in donations, maintain social enterprise initiatives, or attend community events that help generate revenue. [Acws.ca/shelters](https://acws.ca/shelters)

### 8) Learn about the signs of domestic violence. Check in with each other.

When you learn more about the dynamics of domestic violence, you can recognize it in people you know and offer support and connections to shelters. Let those who may be feeling unsafe know of the supports available by phone, or in person from their local women’s shelter. You can find contact information for our member shelters at [acws.ca/shelters](https://acws.ca/shelters).

### 9) Trust your instincts

If you are in immediate danger, call 911. If you suspect that someone’s life may be in danger, please call 911. To speak to someone at a shelter near you, call our toll-free 24/7 line, 1-866-331-3933. You do not have to stay in a shelter to get help from one and **they are ready to help.**

