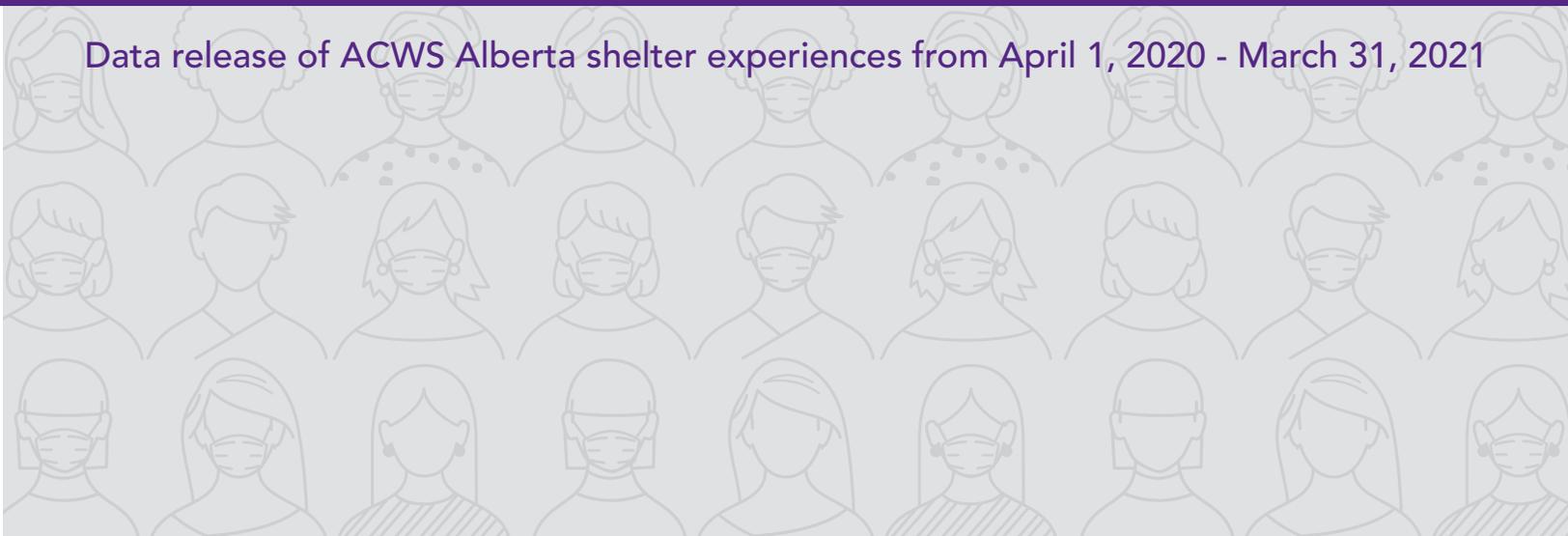


2021 DATA RELEASE:

Data release of ACWS Alberta shelter experiences from April 1, 2020 - March 31, 2021



Frontline Perspective

What shelters are telling us about increasingly complex needs and pandemic pressures.

Shelter staff report that their **clients need support in a broad range of areas** such as primary health care, trauma, and addiction, as well as reliable information on vaccines and public health orders.

Shelters provide residential services and thus, **the pandemic affected their operations in many critical ways.** They are navigating issues such as **increased staff turnover and isolation requirements, reduced shelter capacity** (precipitated by physical distancing requirements and outbreaks), as well as **financial shortfalls.** This myriad of issues—all related to the pandemic—has put **significant stress on shelter operations.**



Shelters received COVID funding dollars that in many cases helped cover new costs associated with COVID, such as PPE, janitorial services, air filtration, etc. However, **the pandemic resulted in many indirect strains on shelters,** increasing their costs in ways not explicitly covered by this funding. The pandemic also **negatively affected their fundraising ability to fill financial gaps.**

Although many aspects of the pandemic have become normalized, **the added resources needed to operate a shelter haven't lessened.**

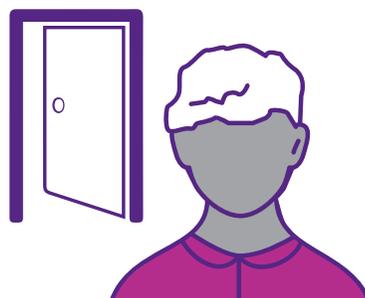
Shelters have persevered during the pandemic. These essential services did not close.

Shelters have been striving to meet and exceed the public health guidelines, remaining open even as many other services and businesses were shuttered during the pandemic.

Despite the challenges COVID-19 posed for domestic violence shelters across the province, shelters remained open and continued to support communities. In 2020/21:



5,602 women, children, and seniors were admitted to emergency shelters across the province



533 women and children were admitted to second stage shelters



Shelters received **52,300** calls from people seeking support



8,095 women, children, and seniors accessed outreach services from shelters



"In order to help our clients, shelter staff need to be experts in public health, addictions, mental health, legal matters, and trauma – where else do you have to wear all those hats to be able to do your job to the best of your abilities?"

– Shelter Director in Lloydminster

Shelters are having to do more and more, with less and less.

Shelters are having to fill service gaps in a wide variety of areas, including healthcare, housing, legal support, and more. This is especially true for shelters in smaller towns and rural areas, where they may be one of the few resources (or the only resource) available, or even open, within the community.

Length of Stay:

18 DAYS: The provincial average length of stay in emergency shelters remained consistent.

378 DAYS: The average length of stay in second stage shelters in smaller towns and rural areas increased by 79 days over the previous year.

In second stage shelters, the length of stay generally stayed the same across the province, except for in smaller towns and rural areas, where it increased significantly. This may be indicative of the barriers and the lack of services (i.e., housing, and financial, safety and legal support, etc.) experienced by women in rural communities.

On-Site Nurse Practitioners & Trauma-Informed Health Care

WINGS of Providence, Edmonton

"Many of the residents at WINGS arrive after fleeing a life plagued with violence. Many have lived in isolation, prevented from tending to their health needs and those of their children. At WINGS, we have a Nurse Practitioner on staff who uses a trauma-informed framework to connect with clients about their health. We are grateful to have her on staff thanks to fundraising and donations – not every shelter is able to do this, although every shelter could benefit from having a nurse on staff.

Clients feel comfortable because she establishes a rapport, and she is a consistent presence in their lives while they are at WINGS. They do not have to tell their stories over and over again to different providers. She may make referrals to specialists, order and interpret lab and diagnostic tests, and connect residents to resources. If a client needs emergency care or falls ill while in shelter, medical intervention is timely and integrated with the team at WINGS. Social workers can ensure the children are cared for if their mom needs to visit the hospital.

One resident described the importance of on-site health care:

"She doesn't just look at the medical side, she gives thought to your individual circumstances and has a genuine interest. She really listens and helps me solve the problem. She looks at the whole person. She is so refreshing. She makes you comfortable enough to share your concerns, and from there I have been able to get the health care that my children and I need."

On-site Nurse Practitioner support has been invaluable during the pandemic. From getting our clients COVID testing, to providing information on vaccinations and helping them book appointments, her knowledge and credibility have been enormously beneficial. Ultimately, establishing proactive health care practices for our residents and their children sets them up for a healthier future."

Shelters provide safety for women *and* their children.

Children constitute close to half of all admissions to shelters across Alberta. Second stage shelters admit a larger proportion of families than emergency shelters, with children representing 65% of those admissions, compared to 41% in emergency shelters.

- Shelters are safe and welcoming places for children. Many shelters have childcare or daycare facilities as well as offering child support programs.
- Over the last 2 years, the proportion of women with children increased in second stage shelters and decreased in emergency shelters. This may reflect a preference for the self-contained units offered by second stage shelters over communal living, particularly during a pandemic.
- The additional benefit of the longer stay at second stage shelters allows for more stability and time to heal, for both the women and their children.
- Families in shelter had additional needs that arose during the pandemic, including the need for tech items (tablets and computers) for children who were accessing school online. Shelters responded by sourcing these items through donations and third-party funders, so that children could continue to participate in their schooling.



“Every woman shared about their relationship with their children as being a source of joy. Successful parenting involves skill, support, and commitment. Mother and children find joy together. In the future, family relationships will be based on the experience of joy rather than surviving pain and trauma. Joy is the game changer.”

– Excerpt from Project Impact Reports: Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters (2021)¹



More Action is Required.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) identified in 2015 the “grossly disproportionate rates of child apprehension”² of Indigenous children, a practice that has placed thousands into the child welfare system. ACWS acknowledges that the domestic violence sector has a role to play in monitoring whether the system responses are improving. These systems have tragically failed Indigenous women and children in the past. ACWS will continue to work with Indigenous partners to learn more about how we can support this process and advocate with them for change.

The Acuity Scale

The ACWS Second Stage Shelter Acuity Scale, in use since 2017, was developed over several years of collaboration and applied research among second stage members. The scale measures barriers faced by women such as violence risk levels, parenting stress levels, poverty indicators, addictions, mental and physical health, and any other housing, financial, legal, and social support issues. As an intake tool, it is useful for tailoring services to address complex client needs more effectively.

"A better understanding of a family's needs at intake allows us to prepare the necessary resources and assign care team members who are best suited and skilled to support a woman and her children. We have seen increasing complexity in the needs of families entering Shelter. Increasingly we are seeing needs that require additional specialized care and intervention, especially related to mental health and addiction."

- Calgary Shelter Director

Pre-pandemic trends vs. numbers during COVID

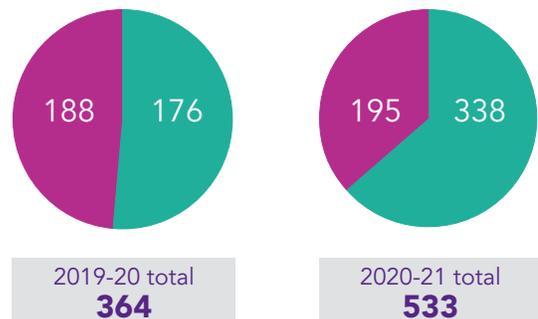
There was a decrease across the province in both admissions and turn-away numbers in 2019-20 and 2020-21. This breaks the earlier trend of increasing admissions and capacity turn-aways in pre-pandemic years. Gender-based violence is a predictable and consistent side effect of economic, epidemiological, and environmental crises such as COVID-19, although evidence of increased violence against women may or may not surface immediately.³

- Emergency shelters have reduced their capacity throughout the pandemic, as a result of public health guidelines, isolation requirements, and outbreaks. Reduced staffing levels also negatively impacted their ability to admit and serve women.
- In addition to their already reduced capacities, shelter staff report hearing from women that the messaging of "stay home, stay safe" made them fearful of leaving for a shelter, also contributing to lower admissions.
- Anecdotal experience suggests that when restrictions and isolation orders were in effect, women were often home with their abusers. Stay at home rules allowed abusive partners to control their actions, cutting them off from family, friends and social supports which is also known to be a common abuse tactic.
- Not all the beds in domestic violence shelters are government-funded. Shelters rely on fundraising and donations in order to make up the shortfall and accommodate as many survivors of domestic violence as possible.

Emergency Shelter - Residential Admissions



Second Stage Shelter - Residential Admissions



■ WOMEN ■ CHILDREN ■ SENIORS

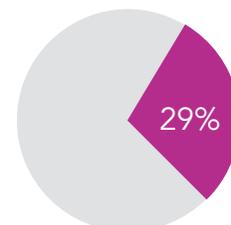
*Admission data includes 46 shelters in 2019-20 and 48 shelters in 2020-21.

Women are at risk from an increasing level of danger.

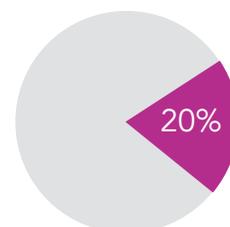
While calls and admissions to women's shelters across the province are down in comparison to pre-pandemic years, this does not mean domestic violence rates have decreased.

- **EDMONTON:** Statistics released by the Edmonton Police Service in 2021 demonstrated a spike in reports of domestic violence, with officers responding to 15% more calls for domestic violence occurrences in 2020 than they did the previous year, and up 20% from the 5-year average⁴. On top of that, the number of domestic homicides doubled in 2020 compared to the previous year, from 2 to 4.⁵
- **CALGARY:** The Calgary Police Service reported that the number of domestic violence calls has remained within its pre-pandemic range of 30,000 calls per year, but they have noticed an increase in calls seeking help for situations that may fall beneath the threshold of criminal but are nonetheless abuse.⁶
- **OTHER JURISDICTIONS:** In Alberta, the RCMP reported 29,588 domestic violence calls across the province during the 2020/21 fiscal year, and 15 domestic homicides. Femicides across the country have gone up as well. In Canada, 92 women were killed in the first six months of 2021, an increase from 78 in the first half of 2020, and 60 in the first half of 2019.⁷

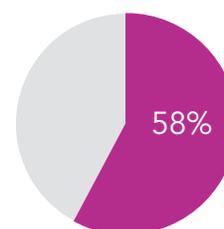
In 2020/21:



Of the 1,155 women who completed the DA, **29% of them had been threatened with a lethal weapon or had a lethal weapon used against them.**



Gun ownership is a significant risk factor for intimate partner femicide¹² and **20% of the women identified that their partner owns a gun.**



58% of the women who completed the DA were **at severe or extreme risk of being killed.**

Guns in Alberta and the Risk to Women

The Danger Assessment (DA) tool developed by Dr. Jacquelyn Campbell has been used by shelters in Alberta for almost two decades and measures a woman's risk of being killed by a current or former partner, with gun ownership being one of the risk factors for femicide. A national poll revealed that Albertans are more likely to own a gun compared to the national average, stating that 25% of survey respondents in Alberta said they currently own a gun, compared to 14% nationwide.⁸ We also know that purchases of firearms are reportedly up across Alberta since the pandemic.^{9,10} Thirdly, another study concluded that rural perpetrators of domestic homicide in Canada are significantly more likely to use a gun (46%) to kill their partner compared to a knife (21.2%) or any other weapon.¹¹ Viewed collectively, this data points to correlations that may exist between gun ownership and perpetration of violent crimes against women in Alberta.

Reaching Women with Outreach Services

Medicine Hat Women's Shelter Society

"Dorothy" is an 83-year-old woman who started accessing outreach services after her husband of 60 years was finally charged with assaulting her. Dorothy had been hiding the abuse for the entire 60 years. Lately, his abuse had become more violent and less easily concealed.

The night he was arrested, Dorothy's husband had been repeatedly beating her in the head and had told her he wasn't going to stop. Dorothy finally was able to scream out for help, and neighbours called the police.

Initially, Dorothy was thrilled to be away from her husband and living a life where she could come and go as she pleased and live without fear. But, despite the no-contact order, Dorothy's husband started coming around again. With typical abuser characteristics, he once again convinced Dorothy to take his side, turn her back on their family and feel sorry for him.

With weekly sessions with our outreach program staff, Dorothy has been able to take her power back. She is thrilled to finally feel safe and even more excited to be able to finally make her own decisions in her life. She can see things for how they are now. Dorothy is enjoying this phase of her life on her terms – doing whatever activities she chooses to, when she chooses, and with whom. And she gets to feel safe all the while.

The demand for shelter outreach services grew during the pandemic.

The number of women accessing outreach programming has grown over the pandemic, from 3,700 in 2019/20 to 6,100 in 2020/21, closer to the number seen in pre-pandemic years.

- Outreach services include safety planning, general counselling and support, assistance finding affordable housing, etc. which can be accessed without the woman residing at the shelter.
- Smaller municipalities, towns, and rural areas showed an even higher trend towards outreach services compared to shelters in major urban centres.

Abuse against older adults and seniors is rising.

The rate of police-reported family violence against seniors in Canada was 8% higher in 2019, marking the fourth consecutive annual increase.¹³ However, there was a drop in admissions of seniors to shelters in Alberta in 2020-21.

- Seniors may be isolated by their abusers and unable to access shelter supports.
- During COVID, seniors have been restricted from engaging in activities outside the home where they may have sought support and relief in the past, resulting in missed opportunities to recognize and respond to a concern about possible abuse.
- Older adults may also have fears about entering a communal living space due to the increased health risks posed by COVID.

“Build back better”: The future of shelters

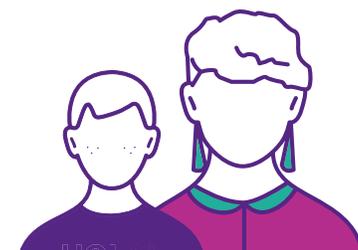
It’s time to consider how shelters are designed.

Many shelter buildings across the province are aging. Some are not able to accommodate accessibility needs, and many shelters are facing the challenge of securing additional funding to maintain or renovate their declining infrastructure.

- Given physical distancing requirements, shelters that are designed with self-contained, apartment-style units are more “pandemic-proof” than communal living spaces, as indicated by the increase in admissions at second stage and the decrease in emergency. Some shelters that have a mixed model (of both emergency and second stage) were able to use their second stage spaces for isolation during COVID. **The second stage shelter model could prove to be more resilient in the event of future pandemics.**
- Second stage shelters provide a longer period of stay—from 6 months to as long as 2 years in some instances—so women are more likely to remain in the shelter once admitted. Notably, over the last several years there has also been an increase in the number of second stage shelters throughout the province, in response to the increasing demand for long-term shelter services and long-awaited funding for this service model.
- Women have been telling us for many years that communal living environments are not conducive to their own healing.¹⁴ The many challenges of communal living include lack of space and privacy, and hygiene (even prior to the pandemic). **Second stage shelters offer a vital balance of enhanced safety and independence for the women who stay in them.**

It’s not just the buildings that are important.

Every building needs trained, caring people delivering supported, evidence-based programming within. Throughout the pandemic, shelters delivered a broad spectrum of services reflecting a diverse array of women’s needs. Shelters need appropriate space to deliver these programs, as well as alternate delivery options. Shelters have highlighted the importance of flexibility in length of stay, outreach options, and community collaborations that provide wrap-around supports. Information sharing, through initiatives such as the Blueprint Project currently being undertaken at ACWS, is also critical.



“We have utilized hotels extensively at our shelter throughout the pandemic. Our building is very old, and it is very difficult for moms to isolate effectively in shelter. They are kept in hotel to minimize the spread. It’s definitely a challenge. We recently had a mom of four kept in a motel for four weeks due to COVID passing from child to child. The youngest child was 1. Can you imagine staying in a hotel for a month with four kids?”

*– Shelter Director in
Central Alberta*

What the Public Needs to Know

Shelters remain open, and they can help in person or over the phone.

Shelters continue to serve women, children, and seniors throughout COVID – over the past fiscal year, **66,687 Albertans were served through residential stays, outreach, or calls to shelters.** The continued demand for outreach services tells us that there is a need for shelter services delivered remotely, in addition to offering residential services. You don't need to stay at a shelter to get help from one.

The most dangerous time for a woman is after she's decided to leave an abusive relationship.

Preparing to leave, or after she has left, an abusive relationship is the time a woman or her children are most likely to be seriously harmed or murdered by their partner.¹⁵ Shelters are the safest place for women fleeing violence. Our members are trained to help women assess their danger levels and create safety plans. Call 1-866-331-3933 to be connected to a women's shelter in your area. If you are in immediate danger, call 911.



Shelters are the safest place for women fleeing violence. If you are in immediate danger, call 911.

How You Can Enhance Safety

1. If possible, donate to your local shelter.

Shelters have experienced a significant drop in fundraised dollars during COVID-19. Women's organizations rely on fundraised dollars more than other types of charitable organizations¹⁶, and COVID-19 caused increased competition for charitable giving as non-profits try to address the operational burdens of the pandemic, as well as restrictions that prohibit activities that generate additional revenue.¹⁷

2. Learn about the types of abuse. Let others know about available supports.

Not all abuse is physical and understanding the different types of abuse can help you recognize it in people you know. You can learn more at acws.ca/domesticviolence. If you have concerns about someone's situation at home, let them know that support is 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.

ACWS offers awareness tools and training for the public. Contact us to learn more at leadingchange@acws.ca.

3. You don't have to stay in a shelter to get help from one.

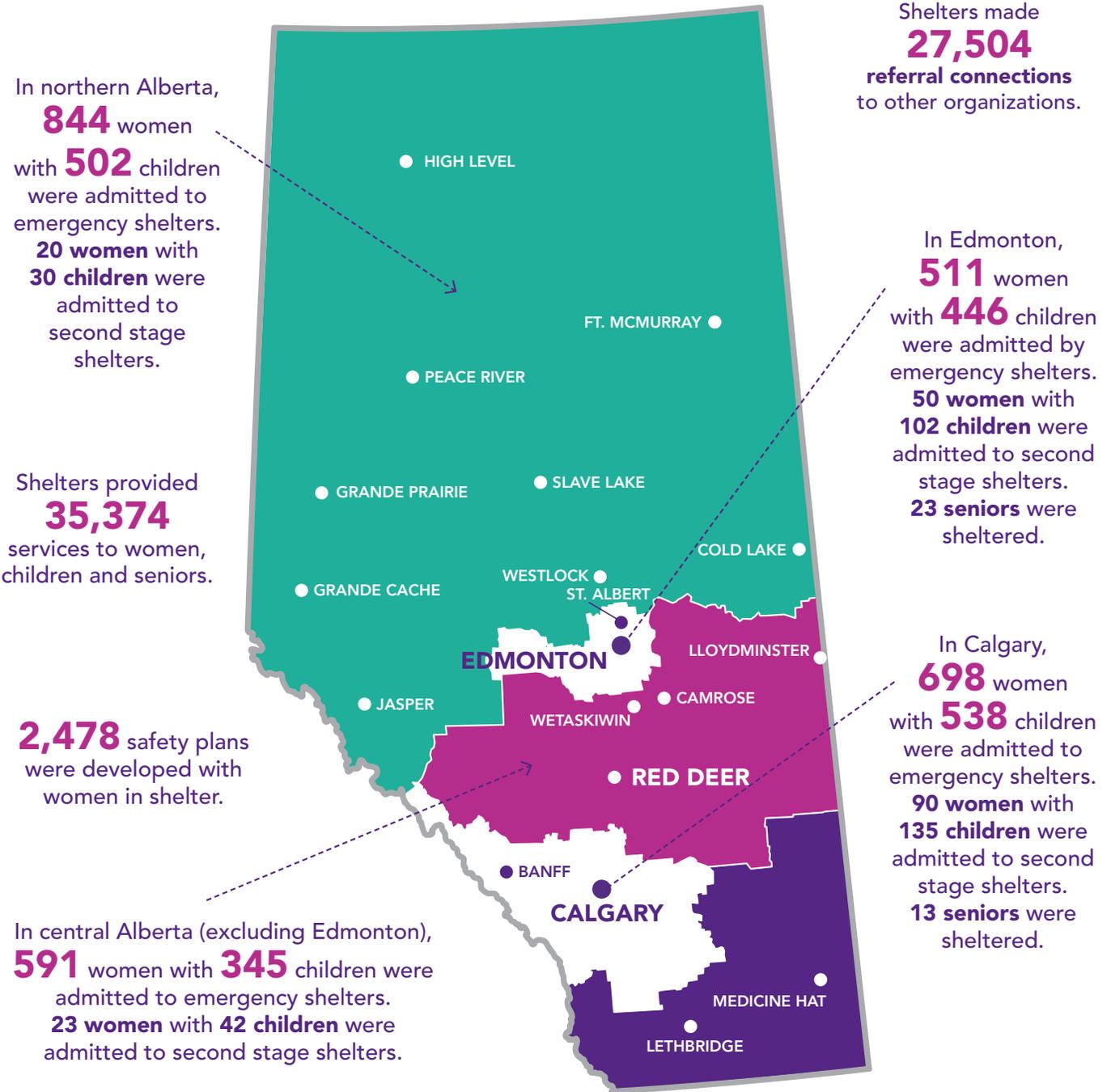
Check in with each other and trust your instincts. If you are in immediate danger, or you suspect someone's life may be in danger, call 911. To speak to someone at a shelter near you, call our toll-free 24/7 line, 1-866-331-3933. **Shelters are ready to help.**



To speak to someone at a shelter near you, call our toll-free 24/7 line, 1-866-331-3933.

The Facts about Domestic Violence in Alberta

During the 2020/21 fiscal year:



● Northern Alberta
 ● Central Alberta
 ● Southern Alberta

66,687 Albertans were served through residential stays, outreach, or calls to shelters.



6,233 women, children, and seniors were sheltered.*

*This number includes 66 who did not provide information about their gender, 13 who indicated another gender, and 55 men.



8,095 women, children, and seniors were served through outreach programs.

Outreach services include women accessing shelters for safety planning, general counselling and support, assistance finding affordable housing, etc. without residing at the shelter.



13,605 turn-aways were recorded for women and seniors requesting admissions. These requests also identified 5,300 children, who would have accompanied their mother into shelter had she been admitted.

A “turn-away” is a request to stay at the shelter that shelter staff turn down either because the shelter simply does not have the space; the shelter has the space but it is unavailable due to public health restrictions and requirements; or the shelter is unable to provide the services requested or needed by the caller (e.g., housing, mental health supports, addictions).¹⁸

Children turned away are the number of children the caller wanted to bring with her, which also determines the space required.



58% of women completing the Danger Assessment were at a severe or extreme danger level.

Shelters work with women to conduct a Danger Assessment (DA) to establish the likelihood of her being murdered by her intimate partner. The levels of danger faced by women remain alarmingly high, in part because of the numbers of women reporting strangulation attempts and being threatened with a gun.



79% of women in second stage shelters had met their goals at the time of leaving the shelter.

Outreach work also has a high rate of achieved goal attainment with 70% in emergency outreach and 87% in second stage outreach services reaching their goals. 53% women met their goals at the time of leaving the shelter across all program types (emergency, outreach and second stage). The most common goals requested by clients are:

- safety for the woman and children
- finding assistance with housing
- financial and income support
- employment and education
- emotional and mental health support

Footnotes

- 1 Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. "Project Impact Reports". Dialogues in Action 2021. 64.
- 2 Truth and Reconciliation Commission. "Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada." Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2015. 138. https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2015/trc/IR4-7-2015-eng.pdf
- 3 The Learning Network. "Covid-19 & Gender-based Violence in Canada: Key Issues and Recommendations." Western University Learning Network 2021. <https://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/docs/COVID-gbv-canada-recommendations.pdf>
- 4 Bucerius, Sandra M., Brad W.R. Roberts, and Daniel J. Jones. 2021. "The Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Domestic Violence and Child Abuse". Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being 6 (2), 75-79. <https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.204>.
- 5 Jay Rosove. "Spike in domestic violence 'serious issue in our city': Edmonton police chief." CTV News, March 18, 2021. <https://edmonton.ctvnews.ca/spike-in-domestic-violence-serious-issue-in-our-city-edmonton-police-chief-1.5353301>
- 6 Kaufmann, Bill. "Huge increases in domestic abuse victims seeking help during pandemic, say advocates." Calgary Herald. Nov. 1 2021. <https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/huge-increases-in-domestic-abuse-victims-seeking-help-during-pandemic-say-advocates>
- 7 Hayes, Molly. "Organizations warned of deadly upward trend in femicide at pandemic's onset. New data confirms their predictions." Globe & Mail, November 24, 2021. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-organizations-warned-of-deadly-upward-trend-in-femicide-at-pandemics>
- 8 Jordan Kanygin. "Guns and ammunition sales up in Alberta amid COVID-19 pandemic." CTV Calgary, March 25, 2020. <https://calgary.ctvnews.ca/gun-and-ammunition-sales-up-in-alberta-amid-covid-19-pandemic-1.4867969>
- 9 CBC Edmonton. "Alberta Gun owners stocking up on ammunition during COVID-19 pandemic." CBC News, March 24, 2020. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/guns-ammunition-shotguns-handguns-cabela-s-swamp-donkey-outdoors-1.5507560>
- 10 Rosa Saba "Albertans less likely to support more gun control, national poll finds." Star Calgary, May 29, 2019. <https://www.thestar.com/calgary/2019/05/29/albertans-less-likely-to-support-more-gun-control-national-poll-finds.html>
- 11 Banman, V. L. (2015). Domestic homicide risk factors: Rural and urban considerations (Unpublished master's thesis). Thesis and Dissertation Repository. (2767). The University of Western Ontario, London, ON.
- 12 Campbell, Jacquelyn C. "Risk Factors for Femicide in Abusive Relationships: Results from a Multisite Case Control Study." <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1447915/>
- 13 Statistics Canada. "Stat Can-Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2019." Statistics Canada, March 2, 2021. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210302/dq210302d-eng.htm>
- 14 Reimer, Jan, and Carolyn Goard. "Measuring Progress: After the Roundtable." 2009. p. 14. <https://acws.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/MeasuringProgressAftertheRoundtable.pdf>
- 15 Tina Hotton. "Spousal Violence after Marital Separation." Statistics Canada – Catalogue no. 85-002, Vol. 21, No. 7. June 2001. <https://publications.gc.ca/Collection-R/Statcan/85-002-XIE/0070185-002-XIE.pdf>
- 16 Women's Philanthropy Institute. "How and Why Women Give." Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. May 2015, 4. <https://wnywomensfoundation.org/app/uploads/2017/08/6.-How-and-Why-Women-Give.pdf>
- 17 Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. "ACWS Shelter Workforce Survey 2019-2020." Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, April 7, 2021, 9. https://acws.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/04.01.21_Summary-ACWS-Shelter-Workforce-Report.pdf
- 18 Shelters count the number of requests for admission, and desperate women may call more than once.

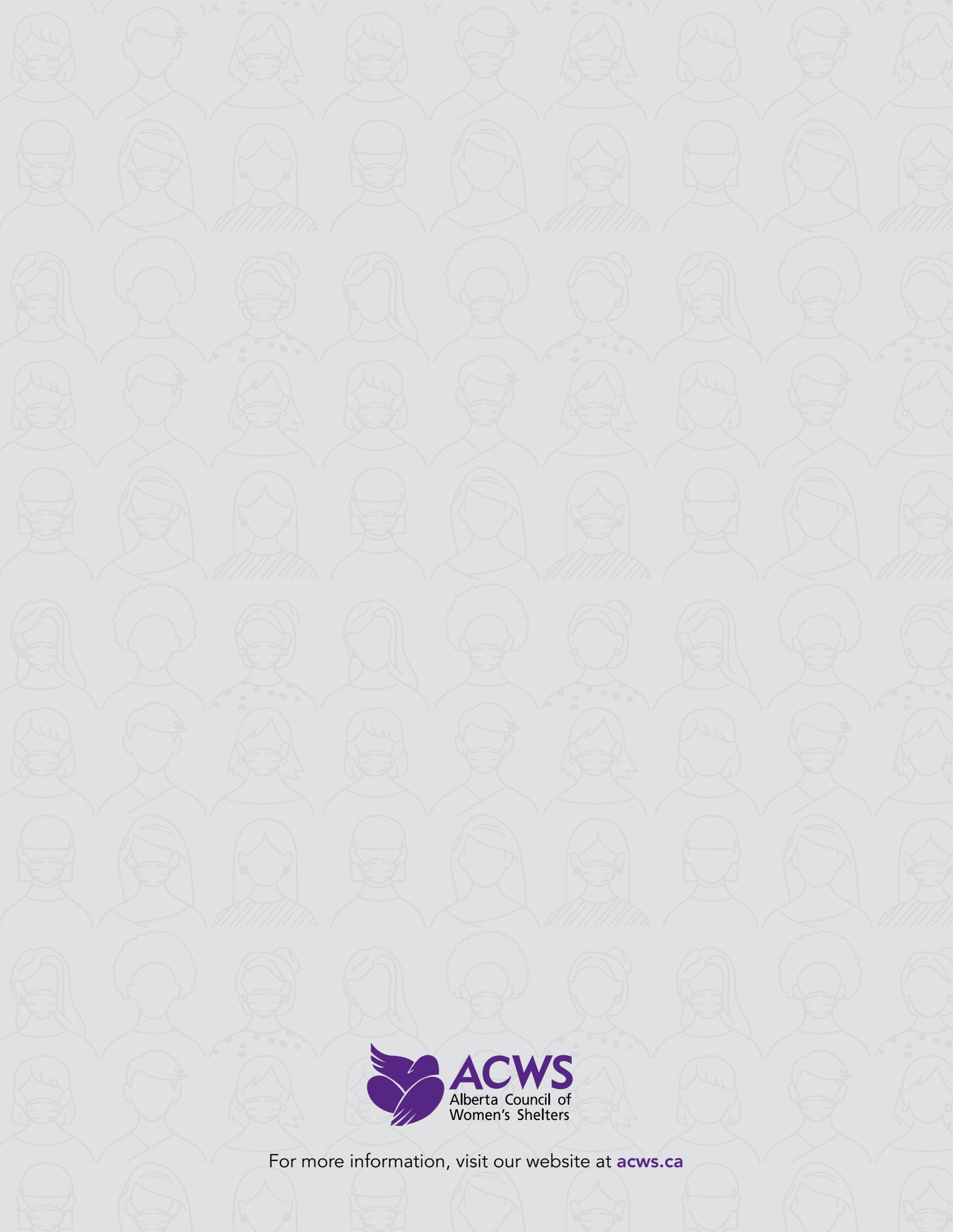
Shelters that Participated in the Data Release

2019/20

Brooks and District Women's Safe Shelter Society
 Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter Society
 Camrose Women's Shelter Society
 Capella Center
 Catholic Social Services
 Central Alberta Women's Emergency Shelter Society
 Central Alberta Outreach Society
 Discovery House Family Violence Prevention Society
 Dr. Margaret Savage Crisis Center Society
 Edmonton Women's Shelter Ltd.
 Fairview and District Women's Center Association
 Grande Cache Transition House Society
 Grande Prairie Women's Residence Association
 Hope Haven Society
 Kerby Assembly
 Lloydminster Interval Home Society Inc.
 Lurana Shelter Society
 Medicine Hat Women's Shelter Society
 Mountain Rose Women's Shelter Society
 Northern Haven Support Society
 Northwest Alberta Resource Society
 Peace River Regional Women's Shelter Society
 Pincher Creek Women's Emergency Shelter Association
 Rowan House Society
 Safe Haven Women's Shelter Society
 Sage Seniors Association
 Sonshine Society of Christian Community Services
 Stoney Tribal Administration
 Strathcona Shelter Society Ltd.
 The Brenda Strafford Society for the Prevention of Domestic Violence
 Waypoints Community Services Association
 Wellspring Family Resource & Crisis Centre Society
 Wheatland Crisis Society
 Wings of Providence Society
 Yellowhead Emergency Shelter for Women Society
 YWCA Calgary
 YWCA of Banff
 YWCA of Lethbridge and District

2020/21

All of the above plus:
 Canadian Pakistani Support Group Association
 Jessica Martel Memorial Foundation



For more information, visit our website at [acws.ca](https://www.acws.ca)