



## APPLICATION FOR FULL MEMBERSHIP

Thank you for your interest in joining the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. Full membership is open to a registered corporation **with the primary purpose of assisting women and families in abusive situations.**

To apply to be a full voting member, please provide us with:

1. A letter from your board requesting membership in ACWS
2. A copy of the minutes from your board meeting requesting membership in ACWS
3. A copy of the society's Certificate of Incorporation
4. A current list of your Board of Directors
5. A copy of the society's philosophy, goals and objectives that have been approved by your board
6. A signed statement that the society supports the purpose, objects and the Ethical/Moral Framework of ACWS

All applications for membership need to be approved by the ACWS Board. All documentation must be received no later than 3 weeks prior to a board meeting to be considered. (Please contact our office to find out the date of the next ACWS Board Meeting).

Should the ACWS board approve an application for Full Membership, the new member will need to submit to us:

1. The fee according to the current fee schedule
2. Names of the member's representatives: one board member (which we call the "Board Delegate") and one "Staff Delegate" (often the Executive Director or Shelter Director) with their contact information including e-mail addresses.
3. A signed Information Sharing Agreement. (This enables us to pull together provincial statistics and advocate for family violence programs on a provincial basis).

Your membership would then become effective upon receipt of your membership fee, the names of your two voting members and the information sharing agreement.

Benefits of membership include:

1. Reimbursement of travel expenses for one Board Representative to attend all General, Special and Annual Meetings of ACWS.
2. Access to our members-hub
3. Timely information, including Members newsletters and Covid updates
4. Attend all ACWS education programs at the member rate (often free).

5. Receive notice of all ACWS public activities.

Full Member benefits can be found attached.

Members' responsibilities include:

1. Notifying ACWS of the society's Board Delegate with current contact information
2. Notifying ACWS of new Shelter Directors and providing their contact information
3. Sending the Board Delegate and Staff Delegate to ACWS General, Special and Annual Meetings.
4. Displaying the ACWS logo on print material, where appropriate, such as newsletters, websites and letterhead.

Information on our purpose and objects, our Ethical/Moral Framework and the Information Sharing Agreement are attached. Please contact our office for more information regarding the current fee schedule.

## ACWS Membership Benefits

### Financial Benefits

- Outcome Tracker (discounted rates and ACWS Help Desk)
- Group Banking rates at ATB
- Access to AUMA employee benefit plans with free e2r Human Resource services
- Reduced room rates at the Chateau Lacombe Hotel
- Reduced membership fee for Women's Shelters Canada
- Reduced costs for St. John's Ambulance
- Reduced Can Talk rates
- Option to use ACWS auditors with our negotiated rates (Metrix Group)



### Raise Awareness and Shift Attitudes

- Province-wide messaging
- Promote your work through our monthly newsletter and social media followers
- Receive a members' only edition of Shelter Matters newsletter
- 18,996 individuals accessed online information about our members on the 'Find A Shelter Page' in 2021
- 100 calls relayed to member shelters every month through the 1-866 Helpline
- Be a key delivery group for Leading Change training in your community
- Access to Alberta database of journalists/media contacts
- Alberta men's attitude survey with regional breakdowns to assist in your community messaging



### Access to Information and Expertise

- Shelter workforce survey allows you to benchmark salaries
- An Ethical and Moral Framework for all members
- The ACWS Annual Data Count: counts what's important to abused women, children and seniors, i.e., without ACWS the number of turnaways would not be released publicly.
- Aggregate quarterly data
- Promising practices available online, opportunity for you to showcase your practices
- Advocacy in Ottawa – an ACWS Hill Day
- Conferences: in the past year we hosted an Outcomes Conference and the Leading Change Summit
- The Compendium of Services outlines member services and contact information
- Development of the Acuity Scale and participation in ground breaking action-based research
- Provide timely and effective responses to database development, questions, and challenges. Each member receives customized care from ACWS
- In-person support and online professional development training for board and staff.

## **INFORMATION AND DATA SHARING AGREEMENT BETWEEN**

**ALBERTA COUNCIL OF WOMEN'S SHELTERS**  
(Herein referred to as "ACWS")

**AND**

(Herein referred to as "Member Organization")

### **I. PREAMBLE FOR AGREEMENT**

Whereas ACWS works collectively with Member Organizations and domestic violence prevention organizations across the province;

Whereas the Member Organization and ACWS are desirous of a better understanding of usage rates, trends, needs and issues relating to domestic violence and elder abuse; and

Whereas the Member Organization and ACWS recognize that the purpose of data collection and outcome measures is to inform service delivery and inform policy to better serve survivors of domestic violence and elder abuse;

Whereas the amount, timing and method of information collection should be first and foremost respectful and sensitive to the needs of the women, children, seniors and Member Organizations;

Whereas it is recognized that ACWS has a role to play in aggregating provincial data on program usage and outcomes;

Whereas it is recognized that ACWS has a role to play in advocating for increased funding for Member Organizations and in initiating, conducting and/or participating in research relating to the causes, impacts, and elimination of violence against women, children, and seniors; and,

Whereas it is recognized that ACWS has a role to play in providing first responder software support to Member Organizations participating in the ACWS Commonly Affirmed Database. Therefore, the Member Organization and ACWS are entering into this information sharing agreement. This agreement replaces and supersedes all earlier information sharing agreements between ACWS and the Member Organization.

## **II. PARTIES TO THE AGREEMENT**

### **2.1 Alberta Council of Women's Shelters**

The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS) is a province-wide voluntary organization that supports Member Organizations and their partners through education, research, and services for the benefit of abused women, children, and seniors. The focus of ACWS is on addressing and ending domestic violence. To this end ACWS:

- Serves as the collective unified voice of member organizations;
- Fosters networking and information sharing;
- Assists in acquiring adequate resources for Member Organizations and ACWS;
- Influences public policy and systems;
- Increases public awareness of issues related to family violence; and
- Fosters professional development within Alberta's sheltering movement.

### **2.2 ACWS Member Organizations**

Member Organizations provide a continuum of services to women, children, and seniors fleeing from domestic violence. Shelters open their doors to provide a safe haven and support women, seniors, and their families as they develop the strength and skill to begin new lives free from violence.

## **III. SCOPE AND TYPES OF DATA**

### **3.1 Scope of Data Available to ACWS**

- The Member Organization will provide, through the commonly affirmed database as described in Section VI, or through other data submission methods if the commonly affirmed Database is not used, data in individualized, non-identifiable format;
- Each client's information will be provided in a format that substitutes a randomly assigned, unique identification number for the client's name, by the name of the Member Organization and by the program within each Member Organization;
- The data will reflect Shelter or Shelter-related programming only, including residential, outreach, follow-up, and children's programming;
- The data available to ACWS will include all items within the shared dataset as described in 3.2 with the exception of those that are collected about non-

shelter related programs, those that contain identifiable information (e.g., names, contact information, case notes, etc.), those that Member Organization chooses not to collect and those that the Member Organization creates for its own internal purposes;

- The scope of data provided by the Member Organization will reflect the types of programming within the organization as well as the Member Organization's capacity to gather the information; and,
- Member Organizations shall only share information with ACWS for which client's informed consent was obtained.

### **3.2 Types of Data Available to ACWS**

#### **3.2.1 ACWS Shared Data Set**

- Information describing individuals and families accessing Shelter-Related Programming, including demographic and historic information, information about their experiences of violence;
- Information about inputs, activities and services provided;
- Information related to service outcomes;
- Information about service usage and occupancy;
- Project-specific evaluation and research information pending individual Member Organization consent;
- Information required to update the Member Compendium of Services as compiled yearly by ACWS;
- Information about individuals and families Shelter-Related Programming is unable to accommodate or serve, reasons why programming is unable to accommodate or serve them and services provided to those individuals and families in the course of the initial contact; and
- The above types of data will be described in a Shared Dataset and the description of the data fields forwarded to member organizations as required.
- Include statement about ACWS requirements for sharing aggregated member data publicly or with third party

### **3.2.2 Other Data**

- Information about staff salary ranges and staffing levels;
- Data supporting ad hoc project implementation;
- Other related information that is mutually agreed to by ACWS and the Member Organizations;
- Methods of reaching agreements re: sharing of other data will be guided by the context within which the data is to be shared –with individual shelters, at a committee level or broader membership. (Please also see section IX below for directions for reaching decisions in case of disagreements).

### **3.3 Other Considerations**

- The Member Organization agrees to include specific research and information questions from time to time so that ACWS can better represent its membership and to support Developmental Evaluation work as well as specific practice and policy improvement projects. Such questions may require amendments to the Shared Dataset, at least for the members participating in the project. The information gathered and the timing of the information gathering will require guidance and permissions from the members that volunteer to participate in such projects.
- The Member Organization and ACWS agree to work towards consistency of reporting across the province. ACWS will support individual Member Organizations to meet standards of excellence in data collection, analysis and reporting as well as the use of data they collect to inform on-going quality improvement of programming.
- In cases where ACWS wishes to access information other than what is described above then it will inform the members and ask for their feedback and approval.
- As outlined in the ACWS Board Policy Manual available to all members, the Social Legal and Ethics Committee (SLEC) provides recommendations to the ACWS Board and advises board and staff on ethical issues related to the shared data base and ACWS research.

## **IV DATA OWNERSHIP**

- Women, children and seniors own the personal information that they provide to each Member Organization;
- Each Member Organization is a Custodian of the data shared by women, children, and seniors:
- Each Member Organization owns the data it gathers from women, children and seniors which the Member Organization can use to produce their own analyses and reports;

- Each Member Organization owns the analyses or reports that it produces;
- ACWS owns the de-identified, disaggregated data shared by Member Organizations;
- ACWS is a Custodian of de-identified Member Organization data;
- ACWS can then use these data to produce aggregate analyses and reports as per purposes described in Section III above; and
- These aggregate analyses and reports are owned by ACWS.

## **V RELEASE AND USE OF INFORMATION BY ACWS**

- ACWS will only release aggregated member data when utilizing information from the shared data base.
- Member Organizations will be given the opportunity to review reports which incorporate their data before they are released;
- Any use of the aggregate data must be consistent with ACWS Board policies;
- ACWS will not publicly release a Member Organization's information unless it is agreed to in advance by the Member Organization's Director or designate;
- ACWS will follow applicable privacy legislation and ethical research guidelines in the use of any data obtained from the Member Organization<sup>1</sup>;
- ACWS will comply with all relevant privacy legislation to ensure that the information it receives from the Member Organization is protected from unauthorized access or disclosure<sup>2</sup>;
- Member Organization information shall not be used or disclosed for purposes other than those for which it was collected, except with the consent of the Member Organization or as permitted by law;
- The Member Organization and ACWS acknowledge that any of the aforementioned aggregate data if captured on the online database may become public information through sources other than The Member Organization and ACWS. Neither the Member Organization nor ACWS shall have any liability to each other in that regard; and,
- All ACWS research initiatives will undergo an ethics review process as described in ACWS board policies.

## **VI. COMMONLY AFFIRMED DATABASE**

- ACWS and Member Organizations have agreed to utilize a common shared software programme to support building collective knowledge and to utilize the membership's collective buying power to minimize costs associated with software purchase and ongoing development;

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<sup>1</sup> Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics (2014). "5. Privacy and Confidentiality". Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans.

<sup>2</sup> Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada (2015). Privacy Toolkit: A Guide for Businesses and Organizations. Available at: [https://www.priv.gc.ca/media/2038/guide\\_org\\_e.pdf](https://www.priv.gc.ca/media/2038/guide_org_e.pdf)



- The majority of ACWS Member Organizations have commonly affirmed a software of choice to meet the Member Organization's information management and reporting needs, and provide assistance to Member Organizations for online data collection and in support of continuous improvement processes;
- Participating Member Organizations have purchased licenses to use this Commonly Affirmed Database, and those Member Organizations will use the Commonly Affirmed Database to share their information with ACWS;
- If the Member Organization is not using the Commonly Affirmed Database or any software to track its information, alternative arrangements must be made to produce data in an agreed-upon format as per Schedule A developed with Non-Participating Member Organizations;
- ACWS agrees to check the market not more often than every five (5) years for the software that is best suited to the needs identified by Member Organizations and make recommendations;
- ACWS has a support role with respect to the Commonly Affirmed Database as described in Section 8.2 below. ACWS does not have any support obligations with respect to any other databases or information collection methods Member Organizations develop independently to track their information; and,
- Those not using the Commonly Affirmed Database will develop individual agreements for data sharing with ACWS. (Please also see section IX below for directions for reaching decisions in case of disagreements).

## **VII. OWNERSHIP AND USE OF COMMONLY AFFIRMED DATABASE**

Participating Member Organizations have agreed to utilize the Commonly Affirmed Database and agreed that they intend to continue to do so in the future. This section pertains to the Member Organizations that are using the Commonly Affirmed Database

### **7.1 Data Base Ownership**

- Outcome Tracker administered by Vista Share currently represents the Commonly Affirmed Database.
- The Vendor of the Commonly Affirmed Database owns the database system, which includes the software and related structure. The Vendor can sell the database or reprogram it. The Vendor also provides services to add just the data base in order to implement ACWS requirements for Shelter-Related Programming and individual Member Organization requirements for Non-Shelter Programming;
- ACWS has purchased a license to use the Commonly Affirmed Database. ACWS has worked with the Vendor to develop a site in the Commonly Affirmed Database that allows it to gather information from Member Organizations with a license to use the database;

- Member Organizations have also purchased a license to use the Commonly Affirmed Database. Any licensing or user fee-related inquiries that Member Organizations may have should go directly to the Vendor; and,
- Members own the information in the queries or reports they produce using the data entered into their individual sites and they can individually decide what to do with these queries or reports without having to consult with the Vendor, other Member Organizations or ACWS.

## **7.2 Permissions Guiding Access to the Commonly Affirmed Database**

- Member Organizations are able to access their own individual information at any time and provide access to their individual sites to as many users in their organization as they deem necessary and in accordance with their agreement with the Vendor;
- ACWS access to commonly affirmed data base
  - The individuals with access to the ACWS site of the Commonly Affirmed Database will be limited to staff employed or contracted by ACWS who will have signed a written agreement to safeguard the privacy and security of the information;
  - For those ACWS staff, contractors, volunteers with signed written agreements, ACWS will request from the Vendor passwords and login ID's. The ACWS staff and contractors shall keep the passwords and login ID's confidential. Any change in staff or contractors will result in an immediate revocation of passwords;
  - No other third party will be granted access to the ACWS site, unless Participating Member Organizations jointly agree and instruct ACWS to grant such access;
- Participating Member Organizations shall develop their own internal policies guiding the use of and access to the data in the commonly affirmed data base. ACWS will support this effort by providing the Participating Member Organizations with templates for such policies whenever possible; and,
- Non-Participating Member Organizations may become Participating Member Organizations without receiving permission from current Participating Member Organizations provided they enter into this agreement.

## **7.3 Entering Data into Data Base**

- Participating Member Organizations that have purchased a license to use the Commonly Affirmed Database will enter and manage their information gathered for case management, outcome management, and administrative data gathering;
- Participating Member Organizations will make their best effort to enter data in a manner consistent with the Shared Dataset definitions as agreed to by the Membership.

- ACWS does not put any data into the Commonly Affirmed Database, unless
  - It is specifically requested to do so by Participating Member Organizations in their individual sites and it is within ACWS's capacity to do so; or,
  - It is for ACWS's own organizational purposes; and,
- Participating Member Organizations shall obtain Informed Consent from their clients to collect information for the Commonly Affirmed Database<sup>3</sup>.

#### **7.4 Customizing the Database**

- The Commonly Affirmed Database is a customizable program that can be adapted to accommodate the individual needs of Member Organizations;
- Member Organizations agree that there are common fields, activities, features and processes of the Commonly Affirmed Database that need to be maintained in a consistent fashion to ensure that all members provide aggregate data to ACWS as agreed by the Membership. Member Organizations agree that, for the purposes of aggregate reporting, they will not change any fields, activities, features and/or processes that are part of the Shared Dataset described in Section 3.2.
- Participating Member Organizations using the Commonly Affirmed Database to manage program information not related to the Shared Dataset may alter those sites according to their needs and preferences.
- Although Member Organizations cannot alter the fields in the Shared Dataset, they can visually hide the fields that they do not use;
- Member Organizations will advise ACWS using the [otsupport@acws.ca](mailto:otsupport@acws.ca) email address of any changes they wish to pursue to the Shared Dataset. This will allow ACWS to monitor Member Organization responses and evaluate the impact proposed changes may have on the Shared Dataset. Should the changes affect the Shared Dataset, then the Member Organization and ACWS will work together to find a mutually agreeable approach and communicate it to all Participating Member Organizations.
- Participating Member Organizations managing multiple programs that fall outside the ACWS shared dataset may work with ACWS support staff to develop a mutually agreed upon process for managing changes to their sites.

#### **7.5 Security and Safeguards**

- ACWS and Participating Member Organizations will make every effort to mitigate any possible human error, or risks associated with data access, storage, disposal or transportation.

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<sup>3</sup> The ACWS Education and Training Committee is in the process of developing a consent for services and release of information with Dr. Dawn McBride of the University of Lethbridge. These documents will be made available to Member Organization upon their completion in 2018.

- ACWS will make every effort to comply with all relevant federal, provincial, municipal or local laws, regulations or orders issued by any governmental or regulatory agency and;
- ACWS will notify the Vendor and all Participating Member Organizations if any ACWS passwords or login ID's are disclosed to any unauthorized third party or are compromised in any way.
- ACWS is available to provide support to Participating Member Organizations who wish to develop their practices related to information security upon request.

## **VIII. ROLE OF ACWS WITH RESPECT TO COMMONLY AFFIRMED DATABASE SUPPORT AND MONITORING**

This section pertains to Member Organizations.

### **8.1 Relationship with the Vendor of the Commonly Affirmed Database**

- With respect to the vendor, ACWS has a support role, as follows:
  - It works closely with the Vendor to manage common elements of software development in a way that responds to expressed Participating Member Organization needs and available funding;
  - It communicates Participating Member Organizations' directions and requirements to the Vendor with respect to the Commonly Affirmed Database; and,
  - It negotiates with the Vendor on group purchases, storage and usage as per the direction of the Membership.

### **8.2 Commonly Affirmed Data Base Support**

- Based upon resources identified and approved in the ACWS budget, ACWS has a support role with respect to the Commonly Affirmed Database as follows:
  - It provides database support and training to staff in Member Organizations;
  - It supports Member Organizations to establish and maintain quality assurance processes;
  - Member Organization's customized annual data
  - Consultation when a Member Organization wishes to make a change in the Commonly Affirmed Database
  - Shelter-Specific Database Development and Training
  - Development and maintenance of support resources;
  - It works with Member Organizations to identify funding required to support their data management processes (e.g., data entry).
- ACWS is not responsible for inputting data and for the accuracy and completeness of data that is provided by the members directly to any third party (e.g., for funding purposes);

- ACWS and the Member Organizations will strike committees comprised of members who are users of the Commonly Affirmed Database to guide communication with the Vendor regarding any software changes that are expected to impact all Participating Member Organizations. Those changes may include software upgrades, shut downs, new programming, etc., with or without additional cost implications; and,
- When specific project funding is received, ACWS may assist Participating Member Organizations with specific research activities including associated database training, provided they adhere to all reporting requirements of the project.

## **8.2 Monitoring the Use of the Commonly Affirmed Data Base**

- ACWS will monitor its use of the commonly affirmed database site, specifically with regard to aggregation of data. Monitoring reports will be provided to Member Organizations on an annual basis and reviewed by the ACWS Board.

## **IX. REACHING AGREEMENT**

- When there are requests that affect this agreement or the future use of the Commonly Affirmed Database (e.g., request by a third party who is a significant partner or funder, changes to database agreements; changes in the supplier, etc.) ACWS will support developing a consensus building process amongst Member Organizations with respect to the issue being considered. The process will consider time and resources available to make the decision, the needs of the Membership, as well as legal and ethical considerations.
- If disagreements cannot be resolved through the consensus building process described above, the parties to the dispute will attempt to resolve the dispute by utilizing alternate dispute resolution processes, including mediation and/or arbitration where process shall involve representatives from all the parties to the dispute and one (1) mediator or arbitrator agreed upon by all the disputing parties.
- If all of the processes above prove unsuccessful in resolving the disagreement, then a  $\frac{3}{4}$  majority of Directors or Designates of the sheltering organizations from the Participating Member Organizations will decide the matter.

## **X. TERMINATION**

- This agreement covers a period from April 1, 2018 to March 31, 2023.
- This Agreement may be terminated prior to the expiration of the fixed period set out above, as follows:
  - By either the participating Member Organization or ACWS, with not less than three (3) months' notice;

- By either party due to failure to abide by the conditions as set out in this agreement.
- This agreement may be reviewed and revised by the parties by mutual agreement at the end of the period of this agreement (March 2023) to ensure that the agreement accurately reflects any other agreements between ACWS and the Member Organizations and any developments within the Commonly Affirmed Database.
- This agreement may be continued after the term specified above for such further periods of time if all of the signatories agree to do so in writing.

**XI. SIGNATURES**

**IN WITNESS WHEREOF THE SHELTER AND ACWS HAVE EXECUTED THIS AGREEMENT THIS  
\_\_\_ DAY OF \_\_\_\_\_, 202\_.**

**(ORGANIZATION NAME)**

**Per:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
WITNESS:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
WITNESS:

**ACWS**

**Per:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
WITNESS:

### Voting Designates: Contact Information Form

<b>Society Contact Information</b>	<b>Information previously provided to ACWS: Initial in the column to the right if the information remains the same</b>	<b>INIT</b>	<b>Record any changes to the 2020 - 2021 information here</b>
Name of Member Society			
Society's Mailing Address			
City, Province, P.C			
Business Phone Number			

#### OUR SOCIETY DESIGNATES THE FOLLOWING TO BE OUR REPRESENTATIVES TO ACWS:

<b>Staff Delegate</b>	<b>Information previously provided to ACWS: Initial in the column to the right if the information remains the same</b>	<b>INIT</b>	<b>Record any changes to the 2020- 2021 information here</b>
Name			
Preferred Mailing Address			
City, Province, P.C.			
Preferred Phone Number			
Cell Phone			
Preferred E-mail			

<b>Board Delegate</b>	<b>Information previously provided to ACWS: Initial in the column to the right if the information remains the same</b>	<b>INIT</b>	<b>Record any changes to the 2020- 2021 information here</b>
Name			
Preferred Mailing Address			
City, Province, P.C.			
Preferred Phone Number			
Alternate Phone Number			
Preferred E-mail			



	<b>Information:</b>
<b>Executive Director</b>	
• Name	
• Work number	
• Email Address	
• Cell Phone Number	
<b>Media Contact Person (if not the ED)</b>	
• Name	
• Work number and extension	
• Cell Phone Number	
• Email Address	
<b>Fund Development (if not the ED)</b>	
• Name	
• Work number and extension	
• Cell Phone Number	
• Email Address	
<b>Emergency Preparedness Team (Second call in case of emergency)</b>	
• Name	
• Cell Phone Number	
• Email Address	
<b>Additional Housing Supports offered</b>	
• Progressive	
• Social Housing	
• Other	
<b>Shelter(s) Physical Address</b>	

## ETHICAL/MORAL FRAMEWORK

### PREAMBLE

*We believe in a world free from violence and abuse.*

Respect for the inherent worth of all human beings is a fundamental moral principle of Alberta Women's Shelters. Respect and caring for others and for ourselves is necessary to achieve a world free from violence and abuse. The elimination of violence and abuse is necessary for the preservation of humankind.

Violence, widespread in the world today, is the abuse and misuse of power in order to control others for personal or political gain. Violence within families is also universal across all nations, cultures, ethnic and faith groups, and regardless of sexual orientation, ability, education, and economic or social status.

**Family Violence:** is the intent, attempt, or act of a person within a relationship (where the relationship is characterized by intimacy, dependency, or trust) to harm another through abuse such as physical, psychological, sexual, economic and/or emotional maltreatment of the other and/or their children. The goal is to establish and maintain power and control through this pattern of coercive tactics.

— Child Welfare Protocol.

As the public became more aware of the extent of violence and abuse within families, shelters were seen as essential for the safety and protection of women and children. In Canada in 1973, the first shelters for women fleeing abuse opened in Toronto, Vancouver, Saskatoon and Calgary. The early Women's Shelters evolved from grassroots collectives grounded in a feminist understanding of family violence as an abuse of power, to multi-faceted organizations grounded in a broader ecological framework. Family violence, and particularly violence against women, occurs in Canadian society where social structures and policies do not respect the dignity and equality of all people and where all members of society do not have the right to have their basic needs met. Today, in addition to direct counselling services for victims and perpetrators, shelters advocate on behalf of individual women and their families as well as advocate for changes in society that would mitigate against family violence. These changes are based on a moral framework that respects the dignity and worth of all human beings.

The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters is committed to providing safe, competent and ethical care for women, children and seniors who access shelters in Alberta. Best practice requires an integrated community-based response to bring together law enforcement, criminal justice, health, education and community agencies in providing direct services. Cultural sensitivity is essential in addressing the needs of women and families from a rich and diverse variety of cultural beliefs. Services must be totally committed to the needs of those who have been abused, the majority of whom are women, children and seniors. When a credible assessment of dangerousness indicates that the lives of a woman and her children are in imminent danger, and

an integrated community response is not immediately available, every effort will be made to preserve life and to obtain a safe solution within the law as early as possible.

Women's Shelters are grounded in the belief that all human beings are of value in themselves and should never be used or abused to achieve other objectives. Community agencies must deal with the complexity of human relationships and the implementation of social policies. This dynamic contributes to ethical dilemmas on a daily basis for those who provide shelter services. Conflicting interests of different parties and adversarial relationships contribute to dilemmas on what are the right, proper, caring, and ethical ways to address specific situations. For these reasons an explicit statement of ethical principles is valuable in guiding relationships among all parties. This Ethical/Moral Framework is intended to guide shelters<sup>4</sup> in their everyday conduct, thinking and planning, when acting in direct service, teaching, research, consultation, administration, management, governance and collaboration roles. The Framework complements other professional codes of ethics, such as, the Social Work Code of Ethics and the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists. It may also assist staff who do not belong to a professional association with a code of ethics. The Framework provides aspirational guidelines in reaching for the best ethical practice rather than defining specific rules of conduct.

The Framework is also intended to serve as a reference document for relationships with the larger community in the work of coordinating the development of protocols, standards and guidelines for family violence practice and research. The relationships that support effective collaborative work must explicitly embody values of mutual respect, honesty, openness, accountability, and commitment to the service of others, individually and collectively. The ideals of freeing individuals and society of violence must never be compromised by agency or self-interest.

## **I. RESPECT FOR THE DIGNITY OF PERSONS**

The Principle of Respect for the Dignity of Persons requires that shelters in all their activities demonstrate their belief that everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person, and that women, men and children are respected and valued for themselves rather than as a means to other ends. Regardless of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, health, ability or social class, people have the right to be free from abuse within their own families. Family violence over time can be prevented by promoting healthy family functioning based on the equality of women and men. Abuse of power in order to maintain control of another person demonstrates a lack of respect and caring for such a person. Because abuse is learned behaviour everyone is vulnerable to being abused and to being abusive. Abuse is not the result of the abused person's faults or inadequacies. Those seeking help from women's shelters are vulnerable, often with feelings of low self-esteem, powerlessness, and fear for their safety. Safety must be the first priority in respecting those seeking help. Not only do they consent to receiving services, but they are provided with assistance in making free informed choices about their lives. The counsellor does not know what decisions are clearly in the client's best interests and therefore supports the

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<sup>4</sup> The term "shelters" includes emergency, second stage and seniors shelters, their staff, volunteers, and boards

client to make her own best choices. Maintaining confidentiality of personal information is one of the foundations of respect for the dignity of persons, and precludes sharing personal information without her consent with a partner, doctor or other people who may assert their right to know, unless otherwise required by law, or to protect persons from serious imminent harm.

## **II. RESPONSIBLE CARING**

The Principle of Responsible Caring requires that shelters demonstrate in all their activities a concern for the welfare of all persons whom they serve in a professional capacity. In order to be competent in providing service, or in conducting research, they need to understand the uses of power in fostering oppression, discrimination and violence. They also need to recognize the diversity of women's experience and how it influences each woman's perspective and identity. Another aspect of responsible caring is ensuring that the aftereffects of violence against women are not pathologized, but rather are viewed as understandable responses to traumatic experiences. Competence requires reflection and self-awareness of one's own biases and emotional reactions in working with vulnerable and often traumatized persons. Maintaining competence may require self-care, the support of colleagues, a balance between professional and personal life, and keeping current on new developments in the field. Competence requires the ability to collaborate with other community services in providing an adequate network of supports.

## **III. INTEGRITY IN RELATIONSHIPS**

The Principle of Integrity in Relationships requires shelters to be honest, open, objective and accurate in all their professional activities, which means that they avoid dishonesty, deception, bias, inaccuracy and conflict of interest. They maintain professional boundaries that separate their working relationships with clients from personal and business relationships that would create a conflict of interest; and where that is not possible they manage the dual relationships completely for the best interests of the clients. If Shelter Workers hold strong personal beliefs that might interfere with their impartiality in counselling, they are obligated to make these known, seek supervision, or reconsider their choice of employment. Sexual or other intimate relationships between Shelter workers and clients are clearly prohibited, as well as intimate relationships with other persons closely associated with the clients that would constitute a conflict of interest.

#### **IV. RESPONSIBILITY TO SOCIETY**

The Principle of Responsibility to Society requires shelters to demonstrate concern for the welfare of society generally, and in this context for the welfare of women and families in society. Because it is unjust for segments of society to be devalued or abused, professionals have an ethical responsibility to use their knowledge and power to contribute to change. Shelters may play a leadership role in advocating for social change. There are multiple avenues for social advocacy from which staff may choose those that are the most appropriate and beneficial uses of their time and talents. Family violence is not just a private matter, but rather a public issue that has impact on all members of society. Therefore, the responsibility for addressing family violence must be shared by individuals and their families, by the community, and by all levels of government, including the judiciary. Citizens need access to information about family violence and a range of service options to address their needs. Family violence programs are needed to improve the safety of those who have been abused, their families and the community. It is important to work to change the conditions in society that contribute to violence and abuse as well as to care for those individuals who have suffered abuse. Injustice exists in society and those who do not see and act for change perpetuate the status quo.