



ON THE FRONT LINES:
Striving to End Domestic
Violence and Abuse Together

2023
Data Release

Domestic Violence Shelter Experiences in Alberta from
April 1, 2022–March 31, 2023

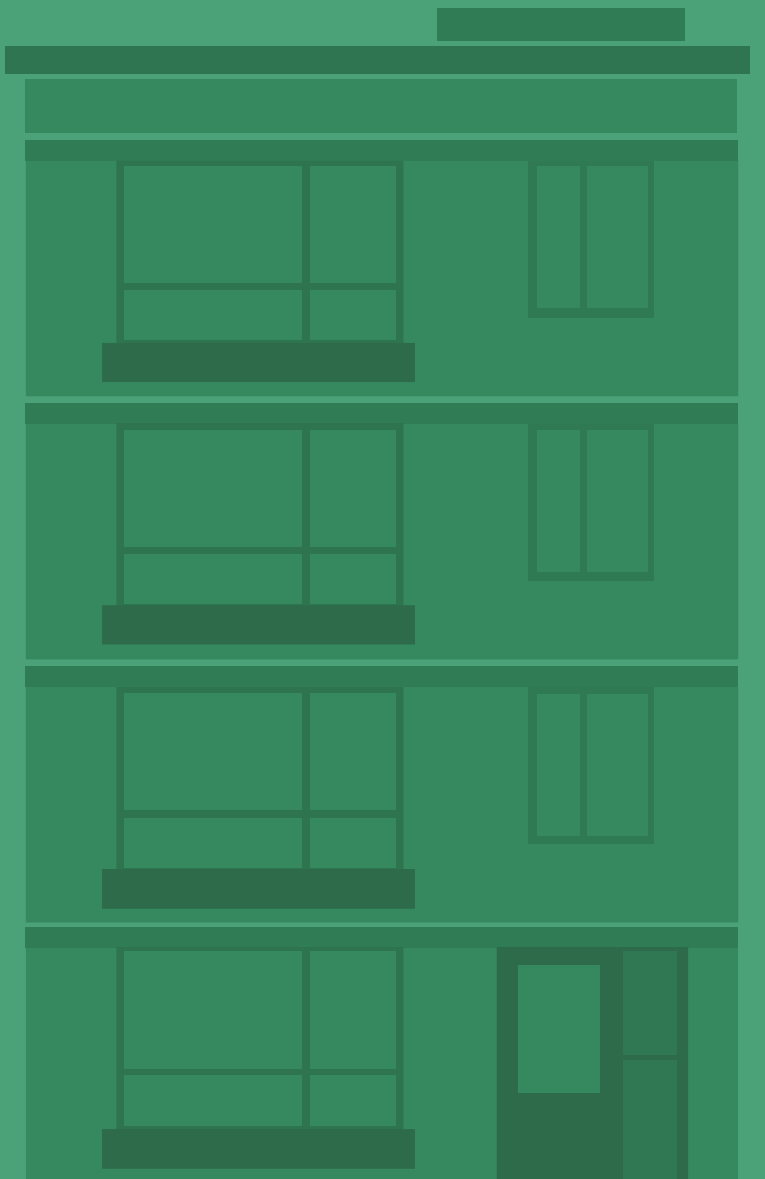


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Executive Summary

This year's data release, *On the Front Lines: Striving to End Domestic Violence and Abuse Together*, is bigger than ever. Not only do we share the aggregated data from domestic violence shelters across Alberta, we share the human stories behind the numbers. While the numbers reveal sobering facts, we share the innovations and successes that give us hope.





This year marks Alberta Council of Women's Shelters' (ACWS) 40th anniversary. Over the past four decades, ACWS has worked with our members to advocate for domestic violence and abuse survivors and their children, and to end domestic violence and abuse. We are proud to report how big an impact that work has had.

- Since ACWS began collecting data 30 years ago, domestic violence shelters have **served over 2 million vulnerable Albertans.**¹
- In the past year alone, shelters provided **58,065 services** to vulnerable Albertans.
- In 2022–2023, shelters answered **59,215 calls for help.**

Shelters do not only provide a roof over survivors' heads, they support survivors in their healing journey, and in many ways, this has been a year of successes. In 2022–2023:

- **Almost half (45%) of survivors** who left domestic violence shelters **successfully completed the shelter program** and met their goals.
- **81%** of survivors surveyed **made progress** with at least one goal they had set.

Some of this year's numbers also tell a sobering story. This past year, domestic violence and abuse increased in frequency and severity. Of the survivors surveyed by shelters across the province:

- **More than 65% were at severe or extreme risk of being killed by a current or former partner.**
- **51% believed their partner was capable of killing them.**
- **42% were strangled by their partner or former partner.**
- **40% had been forced by their partner to have sex.**
- **Over two-thirds (76%) experienced verbal, emotional, or psychological abuse.**
- **Half (51%) experienced physical abuse.**
- **57% reported that the physical abuse had gotten worse** over the past year.

Over the past four decades, ACWS has worked with our members to advocate for domestic violence and abuse survivors and their children, and to end domestic violence and abuse.

¹ This number represents the total number of people served, not the unique number of people served, and it includes individuals who would have been served multiple times over the course of the past three decades.



Despite what the name “shelter” suggests, our members offer survivors of domestic abuse far more than a bed.

Despite what the name “shelter” suggests, our members offer survivors of domestic abuse far more than a bed. In working with survivors on security plans, childcare supports, permanent housing and other needs, shelters reported that survivors faced increasingly complex barriers to leaving their abusers. Survivors have had to deal with the fallout of historic inflation rates, while navigating a dearth of affordable, safe housing to transition to from the shelter.

- 75% of survivors who accessed shelter support in 2022–2023 needed increased help meeting their basic needs.
- Over the past five years, 76% of survivors surveyed by shelters have experienced moderate to high barriers in accessing safe and affordable housing.

These systemic barriers are heightened for survivors from communities that that have experienced marginalization and oppression, including IBPOC (Indigenous, Black, People of Colour)² communities, newcomer, immigrant, and refugee, and 2SLGBTQ+ communities. In 2022–2023:

- 61.5% of survivors surveyed by shelters reported experiencing moderate to high exposure to systemic oppression and marginalization.
- Over 2,000 newcomers were sheltered across the province.

Those who live in rural or remote locations face greater danger than their urban counterparts when abused. The data shows that survivors living in smaller towns and rural areas experienced the greatest danger with 73% of survivors who were surveyed being at severe or extreme danger of being killed.

Our data shows children are as affected as adults by domestic violence. Last year, almost half of all stays in shelter were by children. Children were also affected by a decade of static funding, seen in the fact that shelters were unable to grant 48% more requests for children to come to shelter than the previous year.

Across all age categories, shelters could not grant almost 30,000 requests for safe shelter from Albertans fleeing violence and abuse, due to shelters being overfull and under-resourced. This is the highest number of people recorded in the past decade. These numbers show not only that instances of domestic abuse are trending up, but also that shelter staff and facilities are stretched.

We sound an alarm. Domestic violence shelters are a kind of thermometer, taking the temperature of Alberta’s social wellbeing. The data in these pages show there is a growing fever that needs immediate attention. Increased funding and additional partnerships are key to a sustainable response.

² ACWS has chosen to use the term IBPOC (Indigenous, Black, People of Colour) to acknowledge the widespread, ongoing systemic discrimination against Indigenous people in what is colonially referred to as Canada.

While the numbers show many sobering realities about domestic violence and abuse, this report also aims to spotlight innovation in the sector. We feature:

- The groundbreaking work our members are doing to improve housing affordability, support children exposed to domestic violence and abuse, provide clinical support to survivors and their children, and prevent gender-based violence in their communities.
- How ACWS has expanded The Healing Brain, our trauma-informed education for childcare workers on how to support kids affected by domestic abuse.
- Our Leading Change™ program which is engaging men and boys more than ever before to be national leaders against gender-based violence.

We hope that like us, you find strength in these stories of innovation and hope from the front lines. Training people is key to ending gender-based violence, as is building allies with men and boys. Transformational change, however, will only come when we work together to bring down the barriers to affordable housing and mental health supports. This takes innovation, hope, **and** funds to ensure shelters can fully serve every survivor and all the children who walk through their door.



While the numbers show many sobering realities about domestic violence and abuse, this report also aims to spotlight innovation in the sector.

We Are All Treaty People

ACWS acknowledges the traditional lands upon which we live, work, and play. We recognize all Albertans are Treaty people and have a responsibility to understand our history so we can learn from the past, be aware of the present, and create a just and caring future. ACWS celebrates and values the resiliency, successes, and teachings Indigenous people have shown us, as well as the unique contributions of every Albertan.



The ACWS office is located on Treaty 6 land in Amiskwacîwâskahikan, which is the traditional territory of the Plains Cree and an ancient gathering place of many Indigenous peoples for thousands of years. These lands have also been home to, and a central trading place of, the Blackfoot, Nakota, Assiniboine, Dene, the Métis people of western Canada, and the home of one of the largest communities of Inuit south of the 60th parallel.

We honour the courage and strength of Indigenous women. We honour them as life givers and care givers as we honour and learn from their continuing achievements, their consistent strength, and their remarkable endurance.

Our members serve all nations and all peoples. They are located on Treaty 4, 6, 7, and 8 lands across this province which include the six Métis regions of Alberta.

Acknowledgments



A very special thank you to our members, who are unending in their support of and advocacy for Albertans fleeing violence and abuse.

ACWS offers our deep thanks to all the survivors who consented to share their data for this report, as well as the staff at the domestic violence shelters that collected the data. We thank Women's Shelters Canada for contributing the men's programming and outreach and prevention data for Alberta from their *Shelter Voices 2023* report.

We are grateful to the Ministry of Seniors, Community, and Social Services and the Ministry of Children and Family Services for continued funding to ACWS to support our members in collecting accurate and comprehensive data. This report has not been funded by any government ministry and is made possible in large part by donations from the community. We thank our community donors for supporting this vital work.

This report was independently researched and written by ACWS, in consultation with the shelters that contributed to it. Miranda Pilipchuk, Ph.D., was responsible for writing and overseeing the report. Ashley Reimer, Hannah Friesen, and Morgan Daye supported our members in their data collection throughout the entire year and were responsible for data validation and analysis. Irene Hoffart provided comprehensive disaggregated data analysis and trend analysis. Olivia Street and Carissa Halton provided writing and communications support. Tosha Duncan, the ACWS Data Committee, and shelter staff across Alberta provided feedback on the report.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this work. And a very special thank you to our members, who are unending in their support of and advocacy for Albertans fleeing violence and abuse.

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About ACWS and the Data Release



While the data reveals disturbing trends, there has been incredible work done by domestic violence shelters to respond and we have tried to share those stories here.

The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS) is the provincial network organization of domestic violence and elder abuse shelters in Alberta. We bring 40 years of experience and knowledge to serve our 41 members operating over 50 shelters across the province for those facing domestic violence and abuse. Every year, ACWS compiles and analyzes the data provided by shelters from the previous fiscal year. This data provides important insights into the experiences of domestic violence and abuse survivors as well as the frontline agencies that support them.

While the data reveals disturbing trends, there has been incredible work done by domestic violence shelters to respond and we have tried to share those stories here.

Navigating This Report

Look for the following six types of content found throughout these pages:

1. DATA gathered from 39 organizations operating 53 domestic violence shelters across Alberta.

2. METHODOLOGY notes to help readers understand our research tools, methods, and thinking.



3. INNOVATION STORIES from both ACWS and domestic violence shelters.



4. ISSUE DEEP DIVES take readers deeper into a bigger, more systemic problem.



5. VOICES FROM THE FRONT LINES share experiences direct from survivors and shelters. NOTE: All names of survivors have been changed to protect identities. Shelter locations have been anonymized for added security.



6. CALLS TO ACTION reveal work that need to be done to move towards ending domestic violence and abuse for all.

METHODOLOGY



This data release represents data shared from 39 organizations operating 53 domestic violence shelters across Alberta, in small communities, rural areas, and large cities (find the full list of participating shelters on [page 54](#)).

Please note that 40 organizations participated in last year's data release.

As a result, some of the absolute totals in this report are lower than they may have been in previous years. However, on a rate basis these metrics are comparable to what we have seen in previous years. To ensure we clearly depict both shelter and survivor experiences over the past year, we have included the relative changes in this year's data alongside the absolute totals wherever possible and appropriate.

ACWS and our members are committed to reconciliation and building relationships with

Indigenous communities. An important part of this work involves gathering and using information in ways that are respectful of Indigenous communities and Indigenous knowledge traditions, and contributes to the work of ending violence and abuse against Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people. We recognize and affirm the importance of centralizing Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP) principles in information gathering and utilization processes that partner with Indigenous leadership. We acknowledge the importance of responding to the Missing and

Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action, and the Pathways to Justice Recommendations. All identify disaggregated data as a powerful tool that can be used to address violence against Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people. ACWS is currently working to ensure our data gathering and reporting practices are in alignment with the OCAP principles. Until this work is complete, we have chosen not to release disaggregated data about Indigenous survivors, to respect Indigenous data sovereignty.

A Message to Survivors



We hope the information shared in this report helps the public to understand the obstacles that come with experiencing abuse and the immense courage it takes to face them.



Shelters provide a wide range of services, and help is available.

You are not alone. We are here to help.

Supporting survivors of domestic violence and abuse is at the heart of everything ACWS and our members do. We believe survivors, and we have witnessed firsthand their strength, resiliency, and determination as they navigate abusive relationships and walk the path of healing, safety, and freedom from abuse. We hope the information shared in this report helps the public to understand the obstacles that come with experiencing abuse and the immense courage it takes to face them.

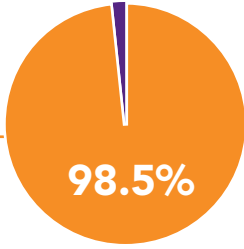
Some of the information shared in this report can be difficult to read. Domestic violence shelters across the province are reporting an increase in both the number of cases of violence and abuse and the severity survivors are experiencing. The unfortunate reality is that there are more survivors in need of shelter spaces than there are spaces to shelter them. However, shelters continue to provide a wide range of services, and help is available. Even when shelters are operating at capacity, they still do everything they can to help every survivor who reaches out.

ACWS and our members continue to stand with all survivors.

A Note About Our Terminology

Using the Term “Survivor”

ACWS uses the term “survivor” to represent all people who are currently experiencing or have experienced domestic violence or abuse. We recognize that not all people who have experienced domestic violence or abuse identify with the term “survivor,” and some people may prefer to describe themselves and their experiences using different terms. We acknowledge no term can adequately describe what it means to have experienced violence and abuse. In consultation with our Survivor Advisory Committee, composed of people with lived experience of domestic violence and abuse, ACWS has chosen to use “survivor” as a term of respect for people currently experiencing or have experienced violence and abuse. We use it to emphasize their personal power, courage, and resiliency. We also honour and respect the choice to be identified by a different term.



The vast majority of the individuals served in domestic violence shelters during the last fiscal year **identify as women.**

About **1.1%** identify as men.

Approximately **0.4%** identify as gender-diverse.

Our Approach to Gendered Language

ACWS recognizes that domestic violence and abuse happen to people of all genders. Shelters serve a wide range of people. To reflect this experience, we use gender neutral language wherever possible. However, it is important to note that women and gender minorities are at an increased risk of experiencing gender-based violence, more severe forms of gender-based violence, and longer-lasting psychological and socioeconomic impacts of violence.³

This is reflected in Alberta's data: 98.5% of the individuals served in domestic violence shelters during the last fiscal year identify as women. About 1.1% identify as men. Approximately 0.4% identify as gender-diverse.

We affirm the importance and the need for resources and supports for gender-diverse people who have experienced violence, as well as safe spaces for them to share and discuss their experiences. Scarcity of resources and aging shelter stock in our sector means that not all shelters, at this point in time, may be able to serve all genders as they would like.

Given that women are overwhelmingly harmed by gender-based violence, our work at ACWS focuses on those individuals who identify as women, but we stand as allies with survivors of all gender identities and sexual orientations. We pro-actively affirm the dignity of all in our pursuit of a world free from violence and abuse.

³ Alexa R. Yakubovich and Krys Maki, "Preventing Gender-Based Homelessness in Canada During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond: The need to Account for Violence Against Women," *Violence Against Women* 28, no. 10 (2020); Marina Morrow, Olena Hanvisky, and Colleen Varcoe, "Women and Violence: The Effects of Dismantling the Welfare State," *Critical Social Policy* 24, no. 3 (2004).

Shelters Supported Thousands Across Alberta



Shelters provided **58,065 services** to adults, children, and seniors

Thousands of **safety plans were developed** with survivors

Shelters connected survivors to other supports **28,838 times**

Admissions of adults and children:

Treaty 8

Emergency **1,552**
Second Stage **41**

Treaty 6

Emergency and Seniors **3,290**
Second stage **183**

Treaty 7

Emergency and Seniors **3,101**
Second Stage **316**

TREND 1

Domestic Abuse is Growing Across Alberta

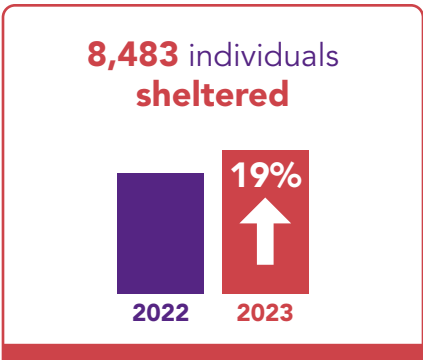
BY THE NUMBERS: In 2022–2023

Growing Calls for Help

Shelters answered 59,215 calls for help. This is a **12.5% increase** from last year and it is the highest number of calls ACWS has recorded in the past 10 years.

Of those calls, 26,317 were calls to request admission. Only 19% of those calls resulted in the shelter being able to provide admission to the caller.⁴ (See Trend 4, page 32).

15,883 were for crisis support. 14,580 were for information and 2,435 were for other reasons.



Growing Numbers of Individuals Sheltered

8,483 were sheltered. This is a **19% increase** from last year.

This includes 4,852 women and seniors, 3,561 children, 53 men, and 17 who identified as gender-diverse.

4,852 women and seniors, **3,561** children, **53** men, and **17** who identified as gender-diverse **were sheltered**



⁴ This number was calculated using the number of adults who were admitted for stays in shelter. It does not include the number of children who accompanied adults.





EMERGENCY SHELTERS:

4,660 individual adults were admitted to emergency shelters.

Emergency shelters offer short-term stays in shelter and longer-term outreach support.



SECOND STAGE SHELTERS:

190 individual adults and **350** children were admitted to second stage shelters.

Second stage shelters, also known as transitional housing, are accommodations for clients who need a longer term stay with access to the supports shelters provide. These supports include safety/security, legal support, safety planning, counselling, and more.

SENIOR SHELTERS

72 older adults were admitted to senior shelters.

Older adults experience intimate partner abuse, but also abuse from adult children, grandchildren, or other family members. An increasing number are experiencing abuse and harm from roommates. Most older adults requesting help are experiencing emotional, physical, and/or economic abuse. Two ACWS member shelters are dedicated to serving older adults, one in Edmonton and one in Calgary.



SHELTER OUTREACH SERVICES

5,973 individuals accessed outreach services from shelters.⁵

Outreach services include safety planning, general counselling and support, assistance finding affordable housing, and advocacy among many other services. These services can be accessed without the survivor staying in the shelter, or by survivors who have transitioned from living in a shelter to living in the broader community.

⁵ Not all shelters have reported on their outreach numbers. Some shelters have experienced turnover in their outreach and data staff positions, which may have resulted in a reduced capacity to gather this data.



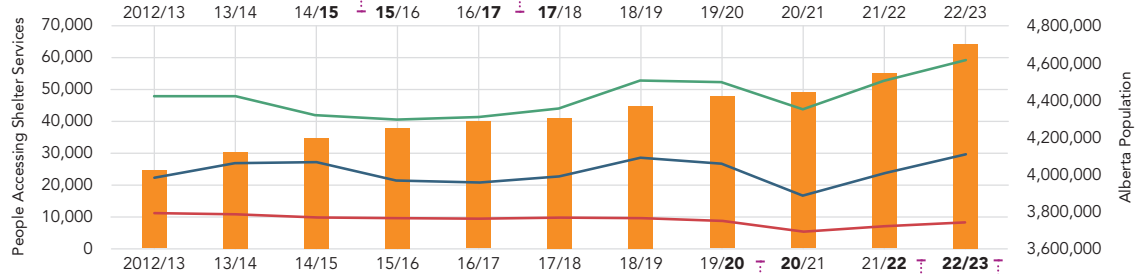
Spotlight on a Decade of Shelter Work

2015: An injection of provincial funding for additional staff in domestic violence shelters had a direct and positive impact on survivors. Additional staff and resources meant shelters had capacity to provide support to a greater number of survivors, even as the Alberta population was increasing.

2017: The one-time funding injection in 2015 was unable to keep up with the steady increase in population and demand. In 2017, the number of survivors unable to be sheltered began to increase.

10 Year Trends

- Alberta Population
- Calls for Help
- Survivors Unable to be Sheltered
- Total Admissions



2020: During the pandemic, many survivors had to isolate or quarantine at home with their abusers, making it more dangerous for them to reach out for help. This danger, combined with the public messaging of “stay home, stay safe,” resulted in fewer survivors reaching out for help. Calls to shelters and admissions dropped as survivors and their children were trapped at home with abusers. Admissions to second stage shelters—which provide self-contained accommodation rather than a communal living space—remained high.

Even though the number of survivors reaching out for help declined during the pandemic, shelters experienced an increasing workload. As other support services closed or moved online, every ACWS member remained open. Many shelters became the sole lifeline in their community, and they stepped up to fill the gaps in services that widened during the pandemic. They did all this while adapting service delivery models to the unique conditions caused by lockdowns and health restrictions, and while navigating health guidelines that constantly changed as health authorities learned more about COVID-19.⁶

2022: As pandemic restrictions lifted, more survivors who had delayed reaching out began to do so. Shelters experienced an increase in need for their services which coincided with historic inflation rates and stagnant funding levels. All combined, these factors placed extraordinary stress on shelters, shelter staff, and on survivors.

2023: Shelters today are experiencing unprecedented and multiple pressure points. Calls for help continue to outpace population growth. Since 2012/13, the Alberta population has grown by 16.9%, while calls for help have increased by 23.7%.⁷ Over the past three years, **calls for help have increased 27.8% per capita**. In addition to this increase in sheer volume, continued fallout from the pandemic, rising inflation, staff burnout and historic highs in staff turnover,⁸ and stagnant funding have stretched shelters far past their limits.

Since the last funding increase in 2015, inflation has risen by almost 25%.⁹ **Shelters are now answering 46% more calls for help than they did in 2015 but with only three-quarters of the spending power.**

⁶ For more information on the impact of the long-term COVID-19 pandemic on domestic violence shelters and survivors, see ACWS' report "When Other Doors Were Closed, Ours Were Open": The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Domestic Abuse Survivors and the Shelters and Staff that Support Them, forthcoming in winter 2023/24.

⁷ Population growth was calculated based on the Government of Alberta's annual population reports for 2019-20, 2020-21, and 2021-22, available here: <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/annual-population-report>, as well as the Government of Alberta's second quarter population

reports for 2013 through 2019, available here: <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/4420320>.

⁸ The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, *Survivors Deserve Better. Shelters Deserve Better. Alberta Deserves Better. The 2021-22 ACWS Domestic Violence Shelter Workforce Survey* (2022). <https://acws.ca/workforcesurvey/>

⁹ See the Bank of Canada's inflation calculator, <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/rates/related/inflation-calculator/>.



Scan to view full report.



CALL TO ACTION

Shelters need an immediate funding increase to address the rising costs and rising need in their community. This funding would enable them to hire and retain staff, so shelters can address the diverse and urgent needs of survivors. The Government of Alberta has committed to increasing funding for domestic violence shelters and to developing and implementing supports for domestic violence survivors.¹⁰ ACWS and our members look forward to working with the Government of Alberta to ensure much-needed funding is distributed in a timely and equitable manner. We are ready and able to provide recommendations on the investments and any policy changes required to ensure Alberta is a national leader in addressing gender-based violence.



¹⁰ See the Children and Family Services Mandate Letter, available online here: <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/bf7f9a42-a807-49b3-8ba3-451ae3bc2d2f/resource/b5216c12-fd9e-4a93-a07d-88afd5649625/download/cfs-mandate-letter-childrenand-family-services-2023.pdf>

METHODOLOGY



The Danger Assessment Tool

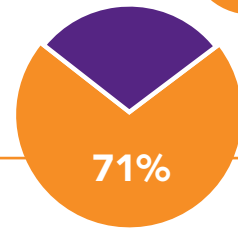
The Danger Assessment (DA) is a validated tool developed by Dr. Jacquelyn Campbell out of Johns Hopkins University that has been used by shelters in Alberta for almost two decades.

It measures a person's risk of being killed by a current or former partner. Completing the assessment with a shelter worker is voluntary, and about one third of survivors accessing shelter services choose to do so. The Danger Assessment can help survivors understand the danger they are in and make informed decisions about their safety.

2022–2023 was a particularly dangerous year. Of the survivors who completed the Danger Assessment across all shelter programs (including

survivors who accessed outreach programs and those who stayed in shelter), 65% were at severe or extreme risk of being killed by their partner or ex-partner.

Survivors staying in shelter continue to face the highest levels of danger. 71% of survivors who completed the Danger Assessment while staying in an emergency shelter were at severe or extreme risk of being killed by their partner or ex-partner. **In second stage shelters, this number rose to 75%.**



71%

Over two thirds of survivors who completed the DA while staying in an emergency shelter were at **severe or extreme risk of being killed** by their partner or ex-partner.



Danger in Rural Alberta

Many survivors in our second stage shelter have moved to our small town to escape abusers in other parts of the province.

This year, one of our young moms walked to a convenience store a short distance away from the shelter. A car pulled up and out jumped her abuser. Her first thought was: how had he found her? The second thought was the realization he was trying to grab their young daughter

to pull them into the car. She picked up her child and ran. She was able to make it back to our shelter.

While we have always had a locked facility, we now have photos of all the abusers in full view for staff who screen the doors. In this way, we

have identified two abusers lurking outside in cars. Our job of keeping survivors safe has gotten harder as they face increasing security threats but, with new trainings and partnerships with the police, we plan to stay ahead of these increasingly tech savvy and mobile abusers.



Strangulation is one of the most significant predictors of future lethal violence. When a survivor is strangled by their intimate partner, their risk of being killed by that partner increases by 750%.¹²

Danger to Survivors is Growing

The Danger Assessment asks a number of important questions that are used to assess the level of danger survivors experience. The following questions are some of the most significant, and the answers collected represent the grievously high danger faced by survivors in Alberta, and by their children.

“Do you believe your partner is capable of killing you?”

- 51% answered yes. This number has been consistently high over the past four years.

“Has your partner tried to strangle you?”

- 42% answered yes. This is the highest number that has been recorded in the past 10 years.

“Has the physical violence increased in severity and frequency over the past year?”

- 57% answered yes. This is one of the two highest numbers that have been recorded in the past 10 years.

“Has your partner ever forced you to have sex when you did not wish to do so?”

- 40% answered yes. This is the highest number that has been recorded in the past 10 years.

¹² Nancy Glass et al., “Non-Fatal Strangulation is an Important Risk Factor for the Homicide of Women,” *Journal of Emergency Medicine* 35, no. 3 (October 2008): 329-35, <https://doi.org/10.1016%2Fj.jemermed.2007.02.065>.



A Q&A on Our Methodology

Why ask survivors?

Survivors are the real experts on abuse. Their perception of their partner's capability to cause lethal harm is an essential indicator of the severity of the situation.¹¹ It takes into account their intimate knowledge of the abuser's behavior, patterns, and potential for violence. Their belief is often based on direct threats, previous incidents, or a deep understanding of the abuser's violent tendencies. For this reason, and so many others, it is essential we believe survivors when they tell us they are in danger and we have the resources available to help them safely leave.

What does strangulation tell us about danger?

Strangulation is one of the most significant predictors of future lethal violence. When a survivor is strangled

by their intimate partner, their risk of being killed by that partner increases by 750%.¹²

Even in non-lethal cases, strangulation is an extremely dangerous form of abuse. Strangulation involves the application of pressure or force to the neck or throat, leading to the obstruction of airflow and blood circulation. Survivors do not always exhibit visible injuries, but they may still suffer long-term health consequences such as brain damage, memory loss, chronic pain, respiratory problems, and psychological trauma, among other debilitating effects.¹³

What are the long-term impacts of physical violence?

Survivors may experience a range of physical health issues resulting from physical violence, including injuries,

chronic pain, reproductive health problems, sexually transmitted infections, gastrointestinal problems, an increased risk of chronic conditions like cardiovascular disease, and even death.¹⁴

What are the long-term impacts of forced sex?

Survivors who are forced to have unwanted sex are at risk of experiencing more serious physical violence by their intimate partner and of being killed by their intimate partner.¹⁵ They are also more likely to experience mental wellness concerns including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts, and physical and sexual wellness concerns, including abdominal cramping or pain, urinary problems, decreased sexual desire, and an increased risk of sexually transmitted infections.¹⁶

11 Jacquelyn C. Campbell, Daniel W. Webster, and Nancy Glass, "The Danger Assessment: Validation of a Lethality Risk Assessment Instrument for Intimate Partner Femicide," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 24, no. 4 (2009); Laura Johnson, Julia L. Cusano, Kristina Nikolova, Jordan J. Steiner, and Judy L. Postmus, "Do You Believe Your Partner is Capable of Killing You? An Examination of Female IPV Survivors' Perceptions of Fatality Risk Indicators," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 37, no. 1-2 (2022).

12 Nancy Glass et al., "Non-Fatal Strangulation is an Important Risk Factor for the Homicide of Women," *Journal of Emergency Medicine* 35, no. 3 (October 2008): 329-35, <https://doi.org/10.1016%2Fj.jemermed.2007.02.065>.

13 See, for example, Gael B. Strack and Casey Gwinn, "On the Edge of Homicide: Strangulation as a Prelude," *Criminal Justice* 26, no. 3 (Fall 2011).

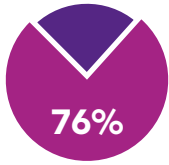
14 Jacquelyn Campbell et al., "Intimate Partner Violence and Physical Health Consequences," *Archives of Internal Medicine* 162 (2002): 1157-1163; Ann L. Coker et al., "Physical and Mental Health Effects of Intimate Partner Violence for Men and Women," *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* 23, no. 4 (2002): 260-68; Anitha Mathew, L. Shakiyla Smith, Brittany Marsh, and Debra Houry, "Relationship of Intimate Partner Violence to Health Status, Chronic Disease, and Screening Behaviors," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 28, no. 12 (2013): 2581-2592; "Exposure to intimate partner violence or family violence was associated with at least a 34% higher risk for cardiovascular events and at least a 30%

increased risk of death from any cause," <https://www.news-medical.net/news/20221031/Intimate-partner-violence-associated-with-higher-risk-of-cardiovascular-events-or-death.aspx>.

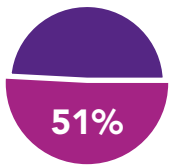
15 Jacquelyn C. Campbell and Karen L. Soeken, "Forced Sex and Intimate Partner Violence: Effects on Women's Risk and Women's Health," *Violence Against Women* 5, no. 9 (September 1999): 1017-1035; Leslie M. Tutty and Kendra L. Nixon, "#MeToo on the Canadian Prairies: Raising Awareness of Sexual Assaults and Mental Health in Women Abused by Intimate Partners," *Violence Against Women* 28, no. 6-7 (2022): 1398-1419.

16 Amy E. Bonomi, Melissa L. Anderson, Frederick P. Rivara, and Robert S. Thompson, "Health Outcomes in Women with Physical and Sexual Intimate Partner Violence Exposure," *Journal of Women's Health* 16, no. 7 (2007): 987-97; Laura P. Chen et al., "Sexual Abuse and Lifetime Diagnosis of Psychiatric Disorders: Systematic Review and Meta-analysis," *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* 35, no. 7 (2010): 618-29; Lucy C. Potter, Richard Morris, Kelsey Hegarty, Claudia Garcia-Morena, and Gene Feder, "Categories and Health Impacts of Intimate Partner Violence in the World Health Organization Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence," *International Journal of Epidemiology* 50, no. 2 (April 2021): 652-62; Jeff R. Temple, Rebecca Weston, Benjamin F. Rodriguez, and Linda L. Marshall, "Differing Effects of Partner and Nonpartner Sexual Assault on Women's Health," *Violence Against Women* 13, no. 3 (2007): 285-97.

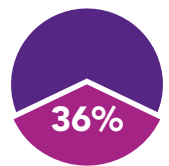
In 2022–2023:



Over two thirds of survivors reported experiencing **verbal, emotional, and/or psychological abuse.**



Half of survivors reported experiencing **physical abuse.**



More than one third reported experiencing **economic abuse.**

Increasing Abuse Across All Forms

Almost all forms of abuse have increased over the past year.

Reports of sexual abuse, spiritual abuse, stalking, electronic stalking, and the abuse of animals are all at 10-year highs.

2022–2023 also marks the second-highest number of reports of trafficking and of cultural abuse in the past decade.

Increasing Need for Support

As the Alberta population continues to grow and navigates the ongoing legacy of the pandemic along with rising inflation, lack of affordable and available housing, and difficulties accessing the physical and mental healthcare systems, more Albertans are turning to domestic violence shelters with greater needs for support.

The services shelters provided in 2022–2023 show increases directly related to economic strain:



75% of the survivors who accessed shelter services needed **increased support meeting their basic needs.**

This includes food, clothing, prescriptions, dental care, and other necessities for themselves and their children. This number is the second highest recorded this decade.

Almost **one third** (32%) of survivors needed **support accessing transportation.**



18% of survivors required additional **financial support & childcare support** beyond what they were able to access through governmental or other community supports.



CALL TO ACTION

Survivors Need Support to Thrive

Survivors are powerful and resilient, and when they have access to the supports and resources they need, they are capable of making profound changes in their own lives as well as the lives of their families and their communities. If those supports and resources are not available to them, many survivors have to struggle to meet their basic needs, and the effect of this ripples out across Alberta.

Supporting survivors is not just the right thing to do; it also makes all of Alberta stronger.



ACWS INNOVATES



Breaking Down Silos: Domestic Violence Shelters & the Legal System

Many lawyers work with domestic abuse survivors, but have never been trained to understand the realities of domestic violence and abuse or the danger and unique barriers survivors face.

In 2022, ACWS launched a new project to address barriers survivors encounter when accessing the legal system. The goals of this project are:

- To engage community members, professionals, and agencies in understanding coercive control and the impact on those who are fleeing it.
- To increase information available in the family justice process about effects of family violence on survivors and their children.
- To improve communication and collaboration between shelter workers and others who work with domestic violence and abuse survivors and family justice professionals.

In 2022–2023, ACWS trained more than 200 lawyers to better understand the realities of domestic violence and the risk domestic abuse survivors face. We have also partnered with Dr. Peter Jaffe and Nick Bala to develop training for shelter workers to better equip them to support survivors in court, as well as training for lawyers to help understand the shelter system and how they can work with shelter workers to support their court cases.

PARTICIPANT QUOTE:

“Keep fundraising these initiatives and give these workers a raise! This is so important, and I hope that there’s infrastructure to make sure it continues.”



Filling Systemic Health Care Gaps for Survivors

Employing a Nurse Practitioner, WINGS, Edmonton

Many women in our shelters have enduring effects from domestic violence they experienced including traumatic brain injury, strangulation, gynecological issues, and struggles with mental wellness and/or substance use disorders. All the survivors in our emergency and second stage shelter programs have faced barriers to medical care. Sometimes their physical injuries are misdiagnosed, overlooked, or underreported. They may experience long waits or inadequate childcare for substance use treatment, inadequate mental health supports, lack of trauma-informed family doctors, and systemic racism. These are only some of the reasons women and their children do not receive appropriate health care.

That's why we have employed a Nurse Practitioner (NP) to be available for all survivors in our shelter. Women and children fleeing domestic violence will initially have an intake appointment with our trauma informed NP. A health and wellness plan is formed and started during their stay. NPs have a similar scope of practice as medical doctors, therefore the NP is able to prescribe medications, order tests, make referrals to specialists or assessment facilities (ie. autism or ADHD assessments), complete trauma-informed women's health exams, respond to suicidal ideation, provide relapse substance use support, organize vaccine clinics, and much more. On any given day, she responds to crisis calls that often

prevent emergency room visits by worried parents. With just one family alone, nine trips to ER/urgent care were prevented over the course of two weeks.

One morning a week she facilitates a health group. It is a time for prevention work like the trauma-informed yoga that has been extremely popular for clients seeking such types of meditative and physical release. Research demonstrates long term support of domestic violence survivors improves their success of ending the cycle of violence and abuse. The Nurse Practitioner is fully integrated into our case management teams which support survivors as they prepare for a safe, healthy reintegration into the community. The NP role is a piece of this larger puzzle which can empower women and their families to make appropriate health choices.

Research demonstrates long term support of domestic violence survivors improves their success of ending the cycle of violence and abuse. The Nurse Practitioner is fully integrated into our case management teams which support survivors as they prepare for a safe, healthy reintegration into the community.

TREND 2

Barriers to Healing from Domestic Abuse Become More Complex

The data shows that not only is domestic abuse increasing, leaving an abuser is becoming more complex, as is the path to healing. Abuse can impact many areas of a survivor's life, including their physical and psychological wellness, and their ability to access resources like housing, education, employment, and health and mental wellness supports. The combination of these factors can be extremely difficult to navigate, and can have long lasting impacts on survivors, their communities, and the domestic violence shelter staff who support them. These are the most significant impacts of abuse that survivors who were surveyed experienced over the past year.




METHODOLOGY

The MOSAIC Tool

Complexity refers to a set of factors in a survivor's life that can intersect in ways that intensify their experience of domestic violence and abuse, create barriers to their healing journey, and increase their need for support as they move towards safety and freedom from violence.

At ACWS, we measure the impact and complexity of abuse using a standardized, evidence-based assessment tool called the MOSAIC, or Measure of Survivor Abuse Impacts and Complexities. Most assessment tools were not designed specifically for survivors, and do not account for the realities of domestic violence and abuse and the unique circumstances and needs of survivors. The MOSAIC was developed collaboratively by ACWS, our members, and our community partners to fill this gap, and to identify the systemic inequities that survivors face. It is one of the first, and only, trauma and violence-informed, survivor-centered assessment tools developed by the domestic violence shelter sector, for the sector.¹⁷



¹⁷ The MOSAIC was originally designed for use in second stage shelters, and that is where it is primarily used now. ACWS is in the process of piloting the use of the MOSAIC in emergency shelters, and a small number of emergency shelters have begun using it as well.





The COVID-19 pandemic and increasing financial pressures have contributed to a Canada-wide increase in mental wellness concerns, and a corresponding increase in the demand on the mental health system.

1. Housing Access is a Major Barrier to Survivors Moving Forward

Access to affordable housing is the single most serious issue identified by the MOSAIC. Over the past five years, an average of 76% of survivors who completed the MOSAIC experienced moderate to high barriers accessing housing. For more information on the significance of survivors being unable to access affordable housing, see the section “TREND 6: Lack of Affordable Housing a Significant Barrier to Survivors” on [page 39](#).

2. Psychological and Emotional Impacts Require Long-Term Supports

In 2022–2023, 73% of survivors who completed the MOSAIC reported experiencing moderate to high psychological or emotional impacts of abuse.

All forms of abuse, including (but not limited to) physical abuse, psychological and emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and forms of coercive control such as threats, intimidation, and manipulation, can lead to significant psychological and emotional trauma. Survivors may experience depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), low self-esteem, and suicidal thoughts. Without adequate supports, this can impact their ability to transition successfully back into the community.¹⁸

The COVID-19 pandemic and increasing financial pressures have contributed to a Canada-wide increase in mental wellness concerns, and a corresponding increase in the demand on the mental health system.¹⁹ ACWS members report that long wait times, limits on the number of sessions available to survivors, and the inability to consistently connect with the same therapist, and difficulties accessing therapy for children exposed to domestic violence are additional barriers survivors experience in seeking support.



73% of survivors who completed the MOSAIC reported experiencing moderate to high psychological or emotional impacts of abuse.

¹⁸ See Bonomi et al., “Health Outcomes in Women with Physical and Sexual Intimate Partner Violence Exposure”; Campbell et al., “Intimate Partner Violence and Physical Health Consequences”; Chen et al., “Sexual Abuse and Lifetime Diagnosis of Psychiatric Disorders”; Coker et al., “Physical and Mental Health Effects of Intimate Partner Violence for Men and Women”; Potter et al., “Categories and Health Impacts of Intimate Partner Violence in the World Health Organization Multi-Country Study on Women’s Health and Domestic Violence”; Mathew et al., “Relationship of Intimate Partner Violence to Health Status, Chronic Disease, and Screening Behaviors”; Temple et al., “Differing Effects of Partner and Nonpartner Sexual Assault on Women’s Health”.

¹⁹ Adam Miller, “2 Years into the Pandemic, Canada’s Mental Health System is at a Crisis Point,” CBC, March 11, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/canada-mental-health-crisis-covid-19-pandemic-1.6382378>.



Supporting Survivors and Their Children with Clinical Care

John was twelve years old when he moved with his mom into our second stage emergency shelter. They were safe from his dad's abuse, but soon I began to worry because he started to have extreme, physical outbursts. To keep him safe, we replaced the glass with plexi in his bedroom window, but he had seen so much trauma, his mother did not know how to deescalate him.

He needed a mental health therapist. In our small town, waitlists for therapists are long, however, that year we had patched together funding to hire a mental health clinician. She began working with John and I noticed a change immediately. Soon the other staff and his mom learned different non-clinical techniques to support and calm the boy. His escalations grew less frequent, less extreme. Soon, he was deescalating himself.

This is the kind of result we saw having a full-time mental health clinician on staff to support the family and children in our shelters.

She worked one-on-one with parents and their kids in scheduled sessions—often exploring issues of anxiety, fear, self-worth, and other impacts of past trauma. She also was instrumental when we had emergent mental health crises. Her clinical skills meant she had the tools to respond to these instances so our staff could focus on the other survivors' needs in the shelter.

She led groups too. While often these groups were with survivors or kids, she also became a critical support to staff in debriefing certain

incidents or exploring alternate, non-clinical strategies for response. Through her work, I gained relief knowing we had the right resources to respond to the mental health challenges that domestic violence brings. We also all gained new skills in observing her gentle, caring, accepting manner.

Unfortunately, our clinician has moved on to another opportunity, but we are committed to raising the money to recruit another. It was a critical service to the survivors and staff in our shelter.

She also was instrumental when we had emergent mental health crises. Her clinical skills meant she had the tools to respond to these instances so our staff could focus on the other survivors' needs in the shelter.



CALL TO ACTION

To be supported on their healing journey, survivors need access to long-term mental wellness supports delivered by clinicians with specialized training in domestic abuse and risk assessment, and experience working with survivors. Trauma treatment for survivors should include modalities which are evidence-based with a demonstrated efficacy for addressing complex trauma and associated mental wellness concerns.



20 See Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, "Theme: Service and supports for Indigenous women and their families" *Alberta Council of Women's Shelters*, September 30, 2016. https://acws.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/2016-09-30_KWS_IndigenousWomen_Brief.pdf; Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, "Theme: Services and supports for diverse women and children fleeing domestic violence" *Alberta Council of Women's Shelters*, September 30, 2016. https://acws.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/2016-09-30_KWS_DiverseWomenBrief.pdf; Jaffray, B., "Intimate partner violence: Experiences of sexual minority women in Canada, 2018." *Juristat. Statistics Canada Catalogue* (2021) no. 85-002-X; Peitzmeier et al. "Intimate partner violence in transgender populations: Systematic review and meta-analysis of prevalence and correlates." *American Journal of Public Health* 110, no. 9. (2020). pp. 1-14; Savage, L., "Intimate partner violence: Experiences of women with disabilities in Canada, 2018." *Juristat. Statistics Canada Catalogue* (2021) no. 85-002-X; Savage, L., "Intimate partner violence: Experiences of First Nations, Métis and Inuit women in Canada, 2018." *Juristat. Statistics Canada Catalogue* (2021) no. 85-002-X;

3. Domestic Abuse Disproportionately Affects IBPOC, Newcomer, and 2SLGBTQ+ Communities

In 2022–2023, 61.5% of survivors who completed the MOSAIC reported experiencing moderate to high exposure to systemic oppression and marginalization (for example, people who identify as Indigenous, Black, or people of colour, members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, and newcomers).

Research consistently demonstrates that survivors who experience systemic oppression and marginalization also experience both disproportionate and disparate rates of domestic abuse.²⁰ These survivors are more likely to experience domestic abuse, and when they do, they are more likely to experience more severe abuse and more severe impacts because of the abuse.

VOICES FROM THE FRONT LINES



Survivors of "Honour-Based" Violence Have Less Options for Support

The police called us to ensure we had space before three women, a mother in her 80s and her two middle-aged daughters, arrived late at our shelter. They had many physical injuries that needed to be attended to, not to mention the emotional ones.

The mother did not want to be here, but the oldest daughter was resolute. That night, their brother had flown into a rage and made derogatory accusations about where they'd been that day. On an earlier occurrence, he'd strangled his married, younger sister to the point she lost her baby. On this night, he strangled the older daughter before moving to her mother. He said he'd kill them. The oldest daughter believed he would, so finally she called for help.

At the shelter, our workers supported the women's healing as well as their legal journey. They changed cars, changed license

plates, sold the house, but still they knew their community held many people who would not hesitate to call their brother to report where they were. They built lists of places they could move to, but even in cities as far as Australia, there were members of their family and community who supported their brother. They did not qualify for victim protection programs.

We developed an amazing collaboration with a seniors' support group who worked with the mom. We worked with police who supported the women to understand what was legal and not legal. We supported them so they

could testify in a language other than their first language, while facing their brother in court.

A lot of violence prevention programs don't speak to the impact of "honour-based" violence. Funding for HBV victims is almost non-existent, despite that they often must cut themselves off from their entire network—church, culture, family—to stay safe.

These women have become a close part of our shelter community. They have taught us so much about the kind of strength and courage many women must find to be safe.



CALL TO ACTION

It is crucial that effective, appropriate, and timely supports and resources are widely available for survivors who experience systemic oppression and marginalization. And it is imperative that we all work to address the systems that continue to perpetuate all forms of marginalization and oppression.



NEWCOMER SURVIVORS EXPERIENCE INCREASED SYSTEMIC BARRIERS



In 2022–2023, **more than 2,000** newcomer survivors stayed in **domestic violence shelters** across Alberta.

For newcomers, immigrants, and refugees to Canada, the experience of domestic violence and abuse can have unique complexities. Abusers often use the language barriers, limited social connections, and lack of understanding rights and laws that can come with moving to a new country to isolate and control their partners. If their abuser is also their sponsor, newcomer survivors may worry that leaving their abuser could also jeopardize their own and their children's status in Canada, and they may decide it is safer for them to remain in the abusive relationship.

Newcomer survivors who do reach out for support may also experience increased systemic barriers, as they must navigate Canada's complex immigration system, as well as gaps in services and supports that are not always culturally informed. For newcomer survivors with precarious immigration status, these systemic barriers are even greater, as they may be ineligible for many of the systemic supports that survivors often rely on during their healing journeys.²¹



For newcomers, immigrants, and refugees to Canada, the experience of domestic violence and abuse can have unique complexities.

²¹ See Edna Erez, Madelaine Adelman, and Carol Gregory, "Intersections of Immigration and Domestic Violence: Voices of Battered Immigrant Women," *Feminist Criminology* 4, no. 1 (2009); Edna Erez and Shannon Harper, "Intersectionality, Immigration, and Domestic Violence," in *The Handbook of Race, Ethnicity, Crime, and Justice*, ed. Ramiro Martínez Jr., Meghan E. Hollis, and Jacob I. Stowell (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2018); Crystal J. Giesbrecht, et al., "'I Felt Like I Was a Puppet—He's the Master, and He's Playing With My Life': Newcomer Women's Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence," *Violence Against Women* (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012231158108>; Crystal J. Giesbrecht et al., "Supporting Newcomer Women Who Experience Intimate Partner Violence and Their Children: Insights From Service Providers," *Feminist Inquiry in Social Work* 38, no. 1 (2023); Hannah Fonteyne et al., "Immigrant Women's Experiences of Domestic Violence in Canada: A Qualitative File Audit," *Journal of Family Violence* (2023): <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-023-00490-1>; Shawna C. Quast, "The Impact of Domestic Violence on Immigrant Women," *DePaul Journal of Women, Gender & Law* 7, no. 2 (2018): 79-102.



Education is key to giving women voice against abusers

VOICES FROM THE FRONT LINES



The Courage and Strength of Newcomer Survivors: RUTH'S HOUSE; Dee Adegugbe

For 20 years, Sarah tried to leave her violent partner. In her home country, her family told her to accept the abuse, "We all went through it. We all survived. He's a good man and is taking care of the children."

For women in our culture, leaving an abuser is complicated because every decision—even ones to leave a violent situation—must consider the village. When survivors do seek permission from leaders to leave, even other women sometimes are not sympathetic to their situation because of patriarchal norms of abuse.

Sarah called our shelter to say she was ready to leave. Since being in Canada, she'd learned that her situation wasn't acceptable, and

she didn't want Children's Services to get involved, nor the police. But Sarah's biggest reason for calling us was that she didn't want her children to think this was the right way to treat women.

Our communities are strong and nurturing, but patriarchal norms continue to influence and silence domestic violence survivors.

Education is key to giving women voice against abusers. It is often the encouragement they need to take the courageous step to walk away.

4. Complexity is Growing

In 2022–2023, 72% of survivors who completed the MOSAIC experienced high or very high complex impacts of abuse.

High complexity impacts both survivors and the shelter staff who support them.



CALL TO ACTION

Recognizing and responding to the complex impacts caused by abuse is essential to the process of survivors regaining control of their lives. Access to a range of support services deemed relevant to survivors, including counseling, therapy, medical care, legal support, and safe housing, is crucial. Trauma-informed care and a multidisciplinary approach that addresses the complex needs of survivors are key to facilitating healing, restoring autonomy, and helping survivors rebuild their lives after the trauma of domestic violence.




TREND 3

The Growing Impact of Domestic Abuse on Children

When children are exposed to domestic violence, they are at risk of numerous negative effects. They may display behavioral problems, exhibit aggression or anxiety, struggle academically, and have difficulties forming healthy relationships in the future. The intergenerational cycle of violence can perpetuate unless intervention and support are provided.²²


BY THE NUMBERS: In 2022–2023




3,561 children were **sheltered**

8,020 children were **unable to be sheltered** because shelters **did not have enough space** to meet the level of demand

This is **48% more** children than the previous year.



2,955 children were **unable to be sheltered** because shelters **did not have the resources** to safely meet the needs of the adult survivors seeking shelter.



18% of adult survivors required **additional childcare support**.²³

17% of survivors answered yes to the question: **Has your partner threatened to hurt the children?**²⁴ This is one of the three **highest numbers recorded** since ACWS members began gathering this information.

²² Jassamine Tabibi, Linda Baker, and Robert Nonomura, "Understanding Resilience in Children Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence – What We Know from Current Literature," *Learning Network Brief 38* (2020). ISBN: 978-1-988412-43-6.

²³ This number includes survivors accessing all services provided by domestic violence shelters, including survivors who stay in shelter as well as survivors accessing outreach services.

²⁴ This number was gathered as part of the Danger Assessment process, and only represents survivors who completed the Danger Assessment.





CALL TO ACTION

Intervention for children exposed to domestic violence at a young age is crucial. Early intervention can mitigate the long-term negative effects on their well-being and break the cycle of violence. Providing comprehensive support services for children residing in shelters such as counseling, education, and therapeutic activities, promotes healing, resilience, and healthy development. Investing in serving children is not only crucial for their well-being but also plays a pivotal role in preventing future violence and breaking the intergenerational cycle of abuse.²⁵ It needs to be a key component of any prevention strategy.



²⁵ Tabibi, Baker, and Nonomura, "Understanding Resilience in Children Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence."

ACWS INNOVATES



The Healing Brain Trains Child-Care Workers in Trauma-Informed Practice

Adverse Childhood Experiences, which can include experiencing or observing domestic violence, can have lasting impact on a person's life. These events increase risk of stroke, heart conditions, suicide, substance use, and many more health challenges.²⁶

On the upside, research shows that just ONE kind, supportive, stable person in a child's life can have a lasting impact too. This person may be a parent, but they could also be a teacher, day care worker, or coach.

In November 2022, ACWS launched our first online course, The Healing Brain: Supporting Children from Trauma to Resilience. The course gives participants a better understanding of early childhood brain development, the impacts of trauma on children, and how to nurture resilience in children who have been exposed to domestic violence. Each module is directly linked to one of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls

to Action, to inform the way service providers work with children through a lens of reconciliation.

This curriculum was developed because children represent almost half of the people who are sheltered across Alberta and we wanted to give shelter workers additional professional development and support in their work with kids in shelter. But Healing Brain has wide application beyond shelters—it's useful material for anyone working with children. We have been pleased to see folks from all over North America access the training to become better informed in their work with children who've experienced traumatic events.

Thanks to a donation from IODE Alberta, the course is free for ACWS members and is currently free for the general public (depending upon future funding, there may be a nominal fee going forward).

To access The Healing Brain, visit: <https://acws.ca/courses/acws-the-healing-brain-supporting-children-from-trauma-to-resilience/>

²⁶ Vincent J. Felitti et al., "Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study," *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* 14, no. 4 (1998): 245-58.



Trauma-Informed Care for Children Exposed to Domestic Violence

Radiance Children's Centre at Radiance Family Centre, Calgary

Joshy lives with his mother and younger sibling at Calgary's Radiance Centre (formerly Sonshine Centre). He is a charming four-year-old boy who has big ideas and thoughts about almost any topic. When one talks to Joshy, it feels like you are talking to a much older child. Staff quickly noted that he took on some parenting responsibility for his younger brother. It became clear he had witnessed abuse in the home and saw himself as a protector of his little brother.

When Joshy entered Radiance's Children's Centre, a daycare dedicated to providing specialized and integrated care for children

who've endured domestic violence and other traumatic events, it was a chaotic transition for him, for the staff, and for the other children. While he is a bright and enthusiastic learner, he was used to being in charge of making decisions. Being in the learning environment of the Children's Centre with present and engaged adults was a completely foreign experience for him. Joshy struggled with the routine, the schedule, and boundaries staff respectfully put in place. This manifested in lots of expressions of temper and anger.

Within weeks, however, Joshy was thriving in the structured and loving environment created by the Children's Centre's cutting-edge research on child and brain development. You could almost see the weight of previous roles he was expected to play, lift off his little shoulders. He is now bounding into the classroom every morning, excited and ready to learn and to play with his friends and fellow students.

Within weeks, however, Joshy was thriving in the structured and loving environment created by the Children's Centre's cutting-edge research on child and brain development.

TREND 4

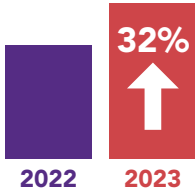
Not Enough Space to Shelter all Survivors in Need



“I’m so sorry, we don’t have space for you right now.”

Domestic violence shelters do everything they can to support every survivor who reaches out for help. Unfortunately, a combination of chronic underfunding and increasing needs in communities across the province means that shelters are often unable to house all survivors who ask to stay with them. The reasons why shelters are unable to house all survivors include lack of physical space and lack of resources to meet survivor needs.

19,247 people were unable to be sheltered due to the shelter having **run out of space**



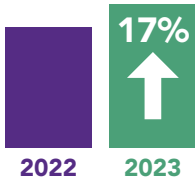
LACK OF PHYSICAL SPACE

In 2022–2023, shelters were unable to grant **11,227²⁷ requests** for admission that were by women and seniors due to the shelter having run out of space, or not having space large enough to accommodate the family seeking admission. **8,020 children** would have accompanied these survivors had there been space. Together, this is a **32% increase** from last year’s numbers.

LACK OF RESOURCES (OTHER THAN SPACE)

Shelters were unable to grant **7,502 requests** for admission that were made by women and seniors for reasons such as lack of resources to safely meet the needs of all survivors. **2,955 children** who would have accompanied these survivors had there been space. Together, this is a **17% increase** from last year’s numbers.

10,457 people were unable to be sheltered due to **lack of resources.**



²⁷ The numbers of admission requests from survivors and their children that shelters were unable to grant due to lack of physical capacity or lack of resources represent the total number of requests that were made, and may include multiple requests from the same survivor. Please note that the current global standard for data collected about survivors who are unable to be accommodated in domestic violence shelters is to calculate the total number of requests for admission, not the number of unique individuals who made the requests. Ethical and safety concerns mean that there is limited data available on the number of unique survivors who are unable to be accommodated in domestic violence shelters, but the data that is available indicates that 80–95% of admission requests are from unique survivors. The impact of being unable to accommodate an admission request is devastating, both for survivors and for shelter staff, and this impact increases exponentially when survivors request admission repeatedly, and are still unable to be accommodated.



Scan to view full report.

Shelters Offer Services Even When They Can't House Survivors

The most dangerous time for survivors is immediately after leaving an abusive partner, so if they are unable to accommodate survivors seeking admission, domestic violence shelter staff explore multiple options to provide survivors with needed supports. While the specific outcomes can vary depending on the survivor's circumstances and available resources in their community, here are some possible scenarios.

1. SAFETY PLANNING OVER THE PHONE OR IN PERSON

When responding to crisis calls and admission requests shelter staff work very hard to support survivors by addressing their safety and other needs, including completing intensive short term safety planning.

2. REFERRAL TO ANOTHER SHELTER

Whenever possible, ACWS member shelters work together to find space for survivors in need. Occasionally, hotel spaces are also used, however these are not preferable, as hotels are not designed to meet the security and support needs of someone escaping an abusive partner.

3. OUTREACH PROGRAMS

When appropriate, shelters offer to serve survivors they are unable to physically house through their outreach programs. Outreach programs offer comprehensive support to survivors living in the community, and they do not require that survivors stay in shelter to access them. A great option for survivors who are not at risk of immediate danger, these programs are unable to provide the same level of physical safety that is available to survivors who stay in shelter, and not all survivors feel that they offer enough security to meet their needs.



Outreach programs offer comprehensive support to survivors living in the community, and they do not require that survivors stay in shelter to access them.



When responding to crisis calls and admission requests **shelter staff work very hard** to support survivors by addressing their safety and other needs, including completing **intensive short term safety planning**.



In many cases, shelter workers may have no way to follow up with survivors. The outcomes of their stories are unknown.

4. REFERRAL TO ANOTHER SHELTER

Shelters will also work with survivors to understand their most pressing needs and to connect them with government or other community-based services that may be able to support them.

5. UNKNOWN OUTCOMES FOR SURVIVORS WITHOUT ACCESS TO SHELTER SPACE

Some survivors who shelters are unable to house wish to remain anonymous. In many cases, shelter workers may have no way to follow up with them. The outcomes of their stories are unknown.

We do know some survivors may seek short-term accommodation with friends or relatives, if they are able. Many have difficulties finding affordable housing. Some have no other options and end up returning to their abuser. Many of the survivors who are unable to access shelter space may experience precarious housing as a result.

VOICES FROM THE FRONT LINES



How Do You Say “No” to Someone Who Needs Help?

Our shelter serves a small city and large surrounding area where the next closest shelter is an hour away. Every day we’re forced to tell an average of four individuals (often plus children) that we can’t shelter them. This, despite the fact we recently increased our shelter capacity by over 35 per cent!

The primary reason we cannot shelter survivors is because of capacity, though we try to keep one room open to ensure women who are actively in danger have a place. Accessibility is also a challenge as we only have one room that is *moderately* accessible (guests can access their room but not many of the common areas in the shelter).

The increasing level of complex needs has also increased the number of survivors we can’t shelter. We don’t have the resources or expertise to help individuals who

need to detox from a substance or who are in an active mental health crisis. Unfortunately, domestic violence trauma often triggers these issues, yet there are few places in our mid-sized city where folks can safely go.

Many of the people we cannot shelter are not in active danger, but are in housing crisis because they left an abuser. One woman and her two kids left her abuser three years ago. We’d helped her find housing, then she returned to her abuser (on average, it takes 7–9 times

before a survivor leaves an abuser for good). When she left again, she was couch surfing then came to us seeking a place.

Saying “no,” knowing that housing instability often forces survivors to return to their abusers, it has a very deteriorating effect on staff. We do this work because we want to help, but the constant pressure to prioritize resources puts great strain on many good people serving the community.

Survivors are Waiting Longer for Space

There are currently three second stage shelters in Calgary that use a common intake process and keep a waitlist of clients who have requested admission into the shelters but cannot be immediately sheltered.

In 2022–2023, their data shows:



Survivors **with children** spent an average of **3 months waiting for shelter**. This is **twice as long** as last year.

Survivors **without children** spend an average of **7 months waiting for shelter**. This is approximately **one month longer** than last year.



The primary factors that prolonged the amount of time survivors spent on the waitlist were lack of space in shelters and an increasing number of survivors with larger families. There are a limited number of apartments available that can house larger families, which can mean that survivors with larger families may experience increased difficulty finding space in a second stage shelter and/or increased time waiting for a space.

VOICES FROM THE FRONT LINES



Survivors with Large Families Face Even Larger Barriers to Housing

Mary travelled four hours to arrive at our rural shelter without anything but the clothes on her back—and her ten children.

We scrambled to accommodate them as we have only 24 beds and no specific family rooms. It took her seven days just to catch her breath then, because we are only an emergency shelter, we started to look for places in our community for her to rent. Numerous times we thought she had a place, but when the landlords heard how many children she had, they told her they couldn't help. Mary tried getting into subsidized housing, but while

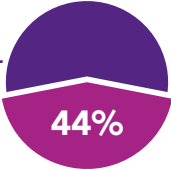
they had empty suites, they didn't have money from government for maintenance so suites stayed empty and shuttered. Tragically, after two months of seeking housing, she returned to her abuser.

Since the pandemic restrictions lifted, in our smaller community we've seen a significant rise in survivors with more than 5 children. Our one success story is a mom who was able to secure a spot in our

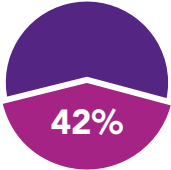
community's subsidized housing. She registered for school and because her oldest children helped care for the younger, she was able to successfully navigate the challenges of being a student and a single parent with a large family.

Very few of our survivors with large families, sadly, are able to successfully leave abusers. This would be a different story if we had affordable housing.

Domestic Violence Shelters in Rural Alberta Face Unique Challenges



Almost half of all the calls for help in Alberta were answered by **small towns and rural areas.**



More than a third of survivors who stayed in shelter **accessed shelters in small towns and rural areas.**

Domestic violence shelters in **small towns and rural areas** were **unable to shelter 35% more** survivors and their children than last year.

The work of domestic violence shelters in small towns and rural communities is priceless. These shelters are often the only source of support for women and gender-diverse-people in their community. Shelters in rural communities experience particularly high demand, and shelter staff are frequently called upon to fill in the gaps when other crucial support services are not available in their communities.

BY THE NUMBERS: In 2022–2023

- Survivors living in smaller towns and rural areas experienced the greatest risk of being killed. 73% of survivors who completed the DA in smaller towns and rural areas were at severe or extreme danger of being killed by their current or former partner.
- Small towns and rural areas answered 44% of all the calls for help in Alberta.
- 42% of survivors who stayed in shelter accessed shelters in small towns and rural areas.
- Domestic violence shelters in small towns and rural areas were unable to shelter 35% more survivors and their children than last year.



73% of survivors who completed the DA in smaller towns and rural areas **were at severe or extreme danger of being killed** by their current or former partner.





Intimate Partner Violence Higher in Rural Communities

Women and girls living in rural, remote, and northern communities experience an increased risk of violence. The rates of intimate partner violence for rural women are 75% higher than the rates for urban women.²⁸ This violence is also more likely to be severe.

Young women and girls in northern communities are killed at more than three times the rate of young women and girls in urban communities.²⁹ These rates of deadly violence are particularly high for Indigenous women, who represent 34% of all young femicide victims in Canada and 76% of all young femicide victims in northern Canada.³⁰ Older adults living in rural areas experience increased risk as well. The rates of family violence against older adults is 45% higher in rural areas than it is in urban areas.³¹

Survivors in rural, remote, and northern communities also experience increased barriers to reaching out for, and receiving,

support. Survivors in rural areas are less likely to have access to reliable cell phone reception or internet, making it harder for them to call for help.³² When they do reach out for help, they may face increased transportation challenges that make it harder to reach supports and resources, and they may have no choice but to rely on risky travel options such as hitchhiking or travelling in unsafe weather.³³ If there are complex factors associated with their experience of violence or abuse, the supports and resources in their communities might not fully meet their needs, and they may be

required to travel a considerable distance outside their community to find the full help they need.³⁴

²⁸ Robert Nonomura, and Linda Baker “Gender-Based Violence in Rural, Remote & Northern Communities,” *LearningNetwork: Mobilizing Knowledge to End Gender-Based Violence* 35 (May 2021): 2.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 8

³² Ibid., 5

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

The rates of intimate partner violence for rural women are 75% higher than the rates for urban women.

Indigenous women represent **34%** of all young femicide victims in Canada and **76%** of all young femicide victims in northern Canada.³⁰





High-Cost Transportation and Housing Leaves Survivors in Rural Alberta at Risk

Jailynn had her baby in an Edmonton hospital then decided to never return to her abusive partner.

The government supported her escape to our community over 500 kilometres north and, as no bus travels here, paid her \$800 cab fare. When they arrived, she and her baby found a safe place to start healing. Because ours is an emergency shelter, she knew she couldn't stay long but soon found she was stranded like many survivors do: Alberta Supports wouldn't pay her return cab fare!

Jailynn began to look at options to stay in the north, but soon realized that even in our small town, she could not afford any of the available rentals. With our support she sought funding. Navigating the system nearly spiralled her into depression. Finally, we connected her to a Friendship Centre in an adjacent town. While we do have a donor-supported emergency fund she could have used for a rental deposit, the Friendship Centre

found additional funding. After five months, she moved out with her daughter into a home of their own.

Our rural shelter is like many others: we struggle with accessible transportation all the time. Regularly, though with little budget, we send the few staff we have on trips as far away as Edmonton. When clients stay in our community, we face difficult challenges. Rising housing costs are leaving the most vulnerable behind.

Rising housing costs are leaving the most vulnerable behind.

TREND 6

Lack of Affordable Housing a Significant Barrier to Survivors



Housing is a Human Right

In 2022–2023, 62% of survivors who participated in the Goal Attainment process identified access to safe and affordable housing as one of their goals. Over the past ten years, housing has consistently remained the single most common goal for survivors.

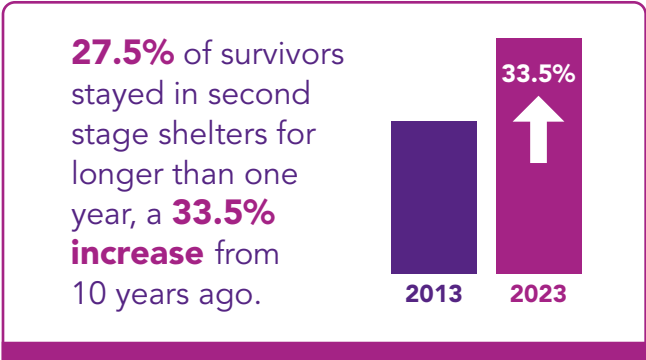
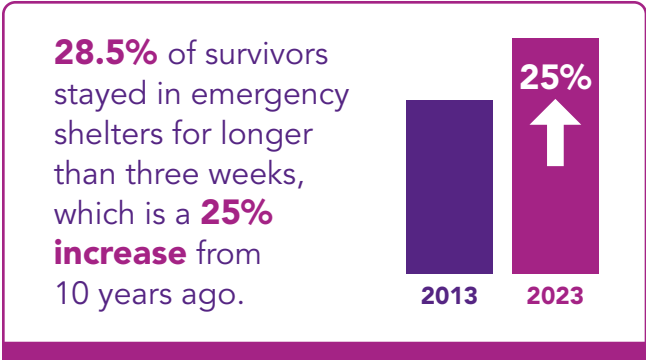
In 2022–2023, housing was also one of the areas survivors experienced the greatest systemic barriers, with more than 1,000 reporting having experienced barriers in securing housing.

The average length of time survivors stay in shelters has been steadily increasing over the past three decades, with marked increases this year. In 2022–2023, survivors stayed in emergency shelters an average of **45% longer** than they did 30 years ago. And they stayed in second stage shelters an average of **25% longer** than they did a decade ago.

This past year also saw more survivors staying in shelter for longer times. **28.5%** of survivors stayed in emergency shelters for longer than three weeks, which is a **25% increase** from 10 years ago. And **27.5%** of survivors stayed in second stage shelters for longer than one year, a **33.5% increase** from 10 years ago.

Survivors stayed in emergency shelters an average of **45% longer** than they did **30 years ago**.

They stayed in second stage shelters an average of **25% longer** than they did **a decade ago**.





Women who experience homelessness are at high risk of experiencing further violence and abuse.

METHODOLOGY



The Goal Attainment Tool

One of the most powerful tools we have for reporting on both the systemic barriers survivors continue to face and the positive impact shelters have in supporting clients in overcoming these barriers is the Goal Attainment Tool.

The Goal Attainment Tool was developed together by ACWS and our members to be a survivor-centered, strengths-based, and trauma and violence-informed tool created by the sector, for the sector. It measures the progress survivors make as they work towards rebuilding their lives. Survivors set goals for themselves during the

intake process and report on their progress as they work through shelter programming.³⁵

³⁵ Second stage shelters have more time with clients than emergency shelters do, and so historically, most of the work on goal attainment has been done with survivors in second stage shelters. However, some emergency shelters are now starting to do more work on goal attainment as well.

Seniors' shelters, like other shelters, are also experiencing increased length of stay. One shelter has seen the average length of stay increase to 74 days, from 61 days previously, and expects to see the length of stay continue to increase as affordable seniors housing limitations become stricter.

These numbers are particularly troubling given that housing is a human right essential for dignity, health, and wellbeing, as well as how interconnected domestic abuse and homelessness are. Research shows that domestic abuse is the leading cause of homelessness in women, and women who experience homelessness are at high risk of experiencing further violence and abuse.³⁶

Albertans across the province are increasingly concerned about health, housing instability and affordability. Imagine facing the current rental market as a survivor with a family to care for, without a landlord reference, and after your bank was account drained by your abuser.

³⁶ For more information on the connection between domestic abuse and homelessness, see: Emily N. Adams et al., "Predictors of Housing Instability in Women Who Have Experienced Intimate Partner Violence," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 36, no. 7-8 (2018): 1-18; Nadia Li, "Domestic Violence & Homelessness," *The Homeless Hub*, October 2, 2016, <https://www.homelesshub.ca/blog/domestic-violence-homelessness>; Anne Andermann et al., "Evidence Synthesis – Evidence-Informed Interventions and Best Practices for Supporting Women Experiencing or at Risk of Homelessness: A Scoping Review with Gender and Equity Analysis," *Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention in Canada*, 41 no. 1 (2021): 1-13 ; FEANTSA, *Guide for Developing Effective Gender-Responsive Support and Solutions for Women Experiencing Homelessness* (2022), <https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/resources/Guide%20supporting%20and%20solutions%20for%20women.pdf>; and Deborah Kahan et al., "Implementing a Trauma-Informed Intervention for Homeless Female Survivors of Gender-Based Violence: Lessons Learned in a Large Canadian Urban Centre," *Health and Social Care in the Community* 28, no. 3 (2020): 828-832.



One shelter has seen the average length of stay **increase to 74 days**, from 61 days previously.

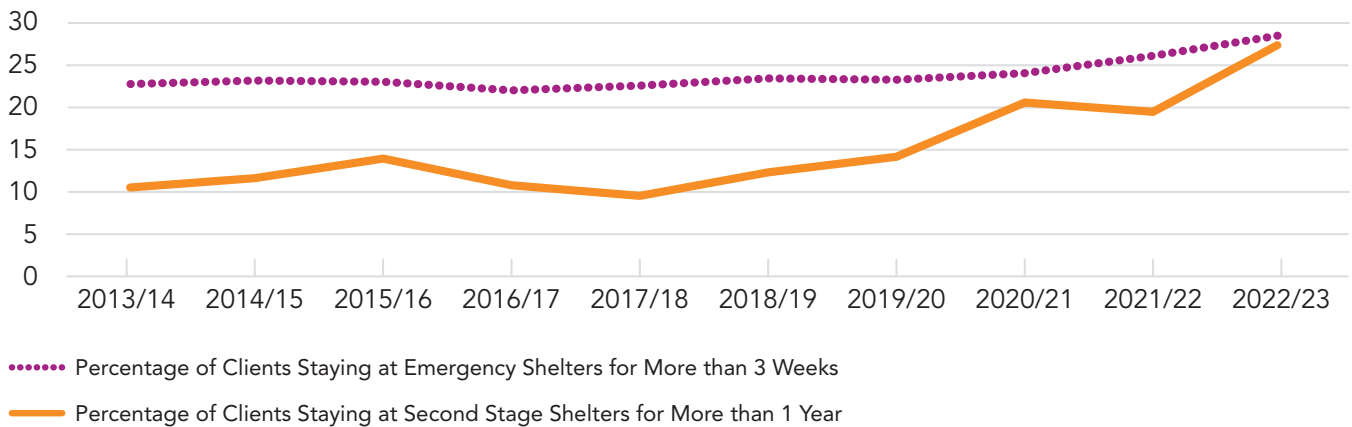
Domestic violence shelters are often all these survivors have to help them get their feet under them. Shelter staff work hard to find housing options for women, which is an increasingly challenging task. By providing temporary homes for survivors, domestic violence shelters help keep pressure off the system, but more importantly keep survivors safe, preventing survivors from experiencing future acts of violence and abuse.

With the limited availability of social housing and affordable housing, many survivors end up staying longer in shelter than they would otherwise like to.



By providing temporary homes for survivors, domestic violence shelters help keep pressure off the system, but more importantly keep survivors safe, preventing survivors from experiencing future acts of violence and abuse.

10 Year Trend of Percentage of Clients Staying in Shelter for Longer Periods



Healing from abuse takes time, and all survivors deserve the opportunity to stay in shelter for as long as they need. However, when they are ready to leave, systemic barriers are increasingly preventing survivors from returning to their communities when they are ready.



Housing Crisis in Alberta

This year's data consistently indicates that one of the greatest systemic barriers survivors currently face is access to affordable housing. Affordable housing continues to remain a challenge for survivors across the province.

The Business Council of Alberta estimates that by the end of 2022 there were 20,000 new households in Alberta, but only 8,000 new homes.³⁷ They project that this disparity will continue to drive up housing prices across the province, leading to a decrease in the number of affordable housing options available to Albertans in need.³⁸

In Calgary, over the past three years the average rent has increased by approximately 40% and the average price of a family home has increased 37%.³⁹ Renters need to earn at least \$84,000 to afford the average market rent.⁴⁰ The Calgary Housing Needs Assessment estimates that "Calgary requires four times more affordable housing supply than what is currently being developed to keep up with the demand."⁴¹

In Edmonton, 49,000 (or 1 in 7) households are in need of affordable housing, with this number expected to increase to 59,000 by 2026. The average market rental costs are too high for more than 80% of these households to afford, and as of 2022 there are less than 15,000 total social and affordable housing units in the city.⁴²

There is often less data available about housing in rural areas, but recent research indicates rural areas experience housing insecurity at rates equivalent to or greater than urban areas.⁴³ In rural Alberta, people who have experienced insecure housing as a result of domestic violence and abuse report that the biggest housing barriers they experienced were low wages and inability to afford rent or mortgage.⁴⁴

Across all areas of the province, housing need and insecurity disproportionality affects people from communities that have experienced systemic marginalization and oppression, including women, 2SLGBTQIA+ people, IBPOC people, newcomers, and people with disabilities.⁴⁵ These communities are also disproportionately affected by domestic violence and abuse (see "Domestic Abuse Disproportionately Affects IBPOC, Newcomer, and 2SLGBTQIA+ Communities" section on page 26).

The lack of affordable housing creates a bottleneck in shelter services for survivors. As survivors remain in shelter for longer than they would like, shelters remain at capacity, and are unable to admit additional survivors and their children who need help.

37 Business Council of Alberta, *Alberta Snapshot: A Quarterly Economic Update* (Spring 2023), 23, <https://businesscouncilab.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Alberta-Snapshot-Spring-2023-FINAL.pdf>.

38 Business Council of Alberta, "We Know What We Need to Do for Housing Affordability—We Just Need to Do It," August 16, 2023, <https://businesscouncilab.com/insights-category/analysis/we-know-what-we-need-to-do-for-housing-affordability-we-just-need-to-do-it/>.

39 City of Calgary, *Housing Needs Assessment 2023* (2023), 5, <https://www.calgary.ca/content/dam/www/csps/cns/documents/affordable-housing/housing-needs-assessment-2023.pdf>.

40 Ibid., 6.

41 Ibid., 27.

42 City of Edmonton, *Edmonton Affordable Housing Needs Assessment* (2022), 3, <https://pub-edmonton.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=162144>.

43 Rural Development Network, *Rural and Remote Alberta: 2023 Alberta Housing and Services Needs Estimation Project*; Rebecca Schiff, et al., "Counting the Undercounted: Enumerating Rural Homelessness in Canada," *International Journal on Homelessness* 3, no. 2 (2023).

44 Rural Development Network, 28.

45 City of Edmonton, 3; Elise von Scheel, "The Housing Crisis is Leaving Ukrainian Evacuees Homeless in Calgary. Here's Why," CBC News, September 5, 2023, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/immigration-housing-crisis-calgary-1.6952184>; Rural Development Network, 21.



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Affordability Makes Healing Possible

With her four terrified children, Ann fled her violent partner of 20 years. The danger was so great, they moved cities. She had no work experience and no landlord reference, and rents were high everywhere.

She found relief at our second stage shelter* in Southern Alberta where our staff helped her apply for government supports. While the subsidized rent rates through Alberta Works have not increased to meet the cost of market rental rates, we only charged rent equal to the amount the government allotted (the shelter fundraises to cover additional accommodation and support service costs).

Ann agreed to participate in our one-year program that included workshops on identifying personal goals, parenting, building healthy relationships, and ongoing safety

plans. Through relationship with her one-on-one worker, she got medical attention for symptoms that had been diagnosed as depression. In fact, she'd been living with a skull fracture.

One of the biggest gifts safe and affordable housing offered Ann was the transformation of her kids. Instead of returning from school and immediately locking themselves inside their rooms, they began to congregate in the dining room, sharing stories and building new, happier family memories.

It takes a long time to heal from years of abuse. Because our second

stage shelter has subsidized rent and maintains no-charge programs, Ann has been able to move safely into community with a plan for a career with the police. She hopes to help other survivors escape their abusers and flourish.

* Where emergency shelters serve survivors by providing bedrooms with short term stays, second stage shelters offer self-contained apartments with a suite of programs and services over a longer period of time to survivors facing high degree of danger or trauma from past abuse. It is common for second stage shelters to have some fee structure to support the service as well as ease survivors into independence.



CALL TO ACTION


Shelters need additional funding and resources to continue to be able to support survivors in navigating systemic housing barriers. And survivors and their children need access to safe, affordable housing.



Other Systemic Barriers

Besides housing, survivors also reported experiencing the greatest barriers navigating the legal system, securing economic stability, accessing mental, emotional, and physical health care, securing employment or education, securing childcare, and meeting their basic needs (which includes necessities like food, clothing, prescriptions, dental care).

VOICES FROM THE FRONT LINES

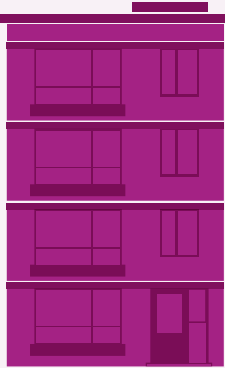


For Survivors in Northern Alberta, Conflicts in Systems Create Barriers

The low-income housing program in our northern community does not work with the Income Support Program, even though both are government programs!

To get subsidized housing, you need steady income, but to get full benefits (steady income) from Alberta Works, you need to get housing. It's a punishing and defeating circle. In fact, survivors with children often face additional hurdles because any money provided by the government is not enough to cover the rental of a place large enough for them and their children. Further, when leaving a marriage or relationship, women often don't have the Child Tax Benefit coming to them, so they are unable to use that money to

help with bills, rent, or groceries—or present as steady income for suitable, subsidized housing.



TREND 7

Shelters Help Survivors Succeed

2022–2023 was also a year of great survivor successes. **Almost half (45%) of survivors who left domestic violence shelters in 2022–2023 successfully completed the shelter program and met their goals.**

Of survivors who participated in the Goal Attainment, **81%** made progress with at least one goal they had set. **More than 70%** of survivors made progress with goals related to parenting, managing substance use, self-care, the wellbeing of their child(ren), connections with community resources, the safety of their child(ren), and their own safety.

These successes speak to both the resilience of survivors and the invaluable work shelters do. All the areas where survivors report the greatest success are areas where they receive direct and sustained support from shelters.

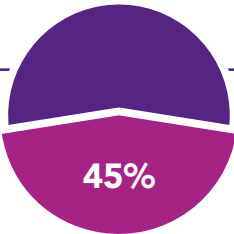


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45%

Almost half of survivors who left domestic violence shelters in 2022–2023 **successfully completed the shelter program and met their goals.**





CALL TO ACTION

It is crucial that shelters receive stable and adequate funding and resources to continue this work with all survivors who reach out for help.

When survivors have access to the supports and resources they need, there is no end to what they can achieve. Their value to this province is infinite. It is up to us, as Albertans, to speak up and speak out to ensure that they have everything they need to shine.



VOICES FROM THE FRONT LINES: SURVIVOR SUCCESS STORY



One Survivor's Story of Success

Sophia moved to a rural Alberta acreage to be with her new, Canadian husband, a man who drove her everywhere, bought her groceries and gifts, and said he'd always take care of her.

The man she thought she married eventually changed. He refused to help her set up a bank account, wouldn't drive her to church nor teach her to drive. His family, when they were around, seemed to mock her accent and parenting. Two days after Sophia had a C-section, her husband travelled out of town for work leaving her to take care of their toddler and infant child alone after the physically traumatic birth.

He became withdrawn, extremely angry, and started drinking. He'd scream at her and not allow her to leave the room until he was done. Nothing she said was right. She felt terribly alone. When he started directing his verbal blows at the children, Sophia felt real terror. If she stayed, what would happen? If she left, he'd be sure to revoke her sponsorship to stay in the country. He'd keep her kids.

A tracking app allowed him to see where Sophia went even though she went to very few places except the library. One afternoon she noticed a brochure there. "Emergency Shelter" was typed boldly at the top. A rush of strength overcame her; this could be her chance to leave and ensure her and her children had a future without fear.

She called the number and the woman on the phone sounded so kind, Sophia began to cry with the relief—and with the fear of what she was daring to do. When her story and need was expressed, the staff member explained the shelter could send and pay for a taxi to pick her and her children up right then. They had clothes for her and the children, they had workers who could help her stay in Canada even if she left her sponsor. Sophia agreed it was the only way. When the taxi arrived, her children did not question their mother's plan. They knew she wanted to keep them safe.

At the shelter, Sophia had a comfortable room to share with her children. As they participated in children's programming to help them feel comfortable, she worked with shelter staff. An emergency parenting order was obtained, she blocked contact from her husband on her phone, she received assurances from Immigration Canada that because of her length of stay, her husband had no control over her residency status. Sophia was supported to get ID, open a bank account and she started receive support from the government to get her on her feet. When she felt ready, she found a job and, through the Escaping Abuse Benefit, secured a rental. In a little over a month, she was on her own but—because of the continued support of the outreach worker and the community she had built over her time at the shelter—she was not alone.

Alberta Provides Innovative Supports for Men

In 2022–2023:

85% of shelters offered some form of **outreach support to men**. This is more than twice as high as the national average.⁴⁶



48%
of shelters offered **outreach programs for men who perpetuate abuse**.

This number is more than twice as high as the national average.⁴⁸

74% of shelters offered **outreach supports for men who have experienced domestic violence and abuse**. This is almost three times as high as the national average.⁴⁷



52% of shelters **worked with men and boys** to prevent violence. This number is 30% higher than the national average.⁴⁹



It is important to note that there are differences in the impact and experiences of domestic violence and abuse reported by women and gender-diverse people and by men. Women and gender-diverse people are more likely to experience domestic violence and abuse, experience more severe forms of abuse, experience lasting negative impacts of abuse, and be killed by an intimate partner.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ This data was obtained from Women's Shelters Canada, and collected as part of their *Shelter Voices 2023* research, and represents the number of shelters who responded to their survey. This data might not include responses from every domestic violence shelter in Alberta.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Donna L. Ansara and Michelle J. Hindin, "Psychosocial Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence for Women and Men in Canada," *Journal of Intimate Partner Violence* 26, no. 8 (2011); Ann L. Coker et al., "Physical and Mental Health Effects of Intimate Partner Violence for Men and Women," *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* 23, no. 4 (2002); Shana Conroy, *Spousal Violence in Canada*, 2019, Statistics Canada (2019); Statistics Canada, *Victims of Police-Reported Family and Intimate Partner Violence in Canada, 2021 (2022)*, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221019/dq221019c-eng.htm>.



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The research available suggests men who have experienced domestic violence and abuse need different supports than women and gender-diverse survivors

There is a need for more research on the service needs of men who have experienced domestic violence and abuse. However, the research available suggests men who have experienced domestic violence and abuse need different supports than women and gender-diverse survivors, and men who reach out for help are most often interested in non-sheltering supports such as legal advice or help navigating the criminal justice system.⁵¹

Alberta shelters have become national innovators on providing support to men who have experienced domestic violence and abuse. Some shelters are able to admit men into their shelters. Many shelters that are not able to physically house men offer supports to male survivors through their outreach programs.



Alberta shelters have become **national innovators** on providing support to **men who have experienced domestic violence and abuse.**



⁵¹ Emma Clark, Katherine Dean, Phoebe Nicholson-Pallett, Maia Samuel, and George Wood, *The Domestic Abuse Report 2023: The Annual Audit*, Women's Aid UK (2023): 50; Respect, *Toolkit for Work with Male Victims of Domestic Abuse* (2019).

ACWS and Domestic Violence Shelters Prevent Future Violence

A crucial part of the work of domestic violence shelters includes working to prevent future acts of violence and abuse from occurring.

In 2022–2023, **100% of shelters ran programs or activities to prevent future violence.**⁵²

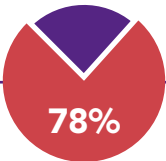


96% of shelters created **public outreach materials** or ran **public campaigns.**

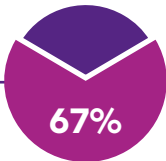
70% of shelters gave presentations to or connected **with politicians and the government.**



89% of shelters gave presentations to or provided training for other **community organizations or workplaces.**



78% of shelters gave presentations to or provided training for **elementary, middle, or high schools.**



67% of shelters gave presentations to or provided training for **health, legal, or social professionals.**

⁵² The data in this section was obtained from Women’s Shelters Canada, and collected as part of their *Shelter Voices 2023* research, and represents the number of shelters who responded to their survey. This data might not include responses from every domestic violence shelter in Alberta.





Although prevention is an integral part of the work shelters do, most shelters don't receive dedicated funding for their prevention programs.

Although prevention is an integral part of the work shelters do, most shelters don't receive dedicated funding for their prevention programs.

In 2022–2023, **59%** of shelters reported they **don't receive any funding at all** for their prevention programs.

93% of shelters reported **funding was the biggest challenge** facing their prevention and other outreach programs.

And **33%** of shelters reported they anticipate **they will have to cut programs in the next year**. This number is **twice as high as the national average**.

INNOVATION FROM THE FRONT LINES



Preventing Violence and Abuse in the Next Generation

Preventative Education for All Children and Youth, Rowan House Society

Our Preventative Education School Program is an evidence-based, interactive approach designed to help break the Intergenerational Cycle of Violence at an earlier age by raising awareness as to what bullying entails and how to stand up to it, teaching friendship and empathy to help foster kinder/safer school environments, and helping teens identify healthy relationships/relationship red flags in addition to teaching strategies to improve their self-esteem to empower them to make healthier relationship choices.

In 2022–2023, our preventative education team reached 4,953 students from all grades, delivering 143 presentations to 241 classrooms.

Summer Adventure Fun Education (SAFE) Program, Medicine Hat Women's Shelter Society

We know summer often isn't filled with adventure or fun for children experiencing family violence, and many families MHWSS supports do not have the means to send their children to summer camp programming. This is why for many years MHWSS has provided a free summer day camp program for children and youth whose families are connected to our services. Alongside typical summer day camp activities, we incorporate family violence education throughout the program. We take the children on many field trips throughout our community, and some favourite past trips include the Royal Tyrrell Museum, Fire Station, Berry Picking, the arcade, Medalta, horseback riding, and many more.

In 2022, 25 children participated in our SAFE program.



Leading Change for a Future Free from Gender-Based Violence

ACWS offers tailored gender-based violence prevention training to workplaces, schools, government, sports groups, and communities through our Leading Change™ program.

In 2022–2023, ACWS presented Leading Change™ curriculum at over 80 events, conferences, and working sessions with external agencies.

In total, we influenced over 7,500 individuals with Leading Change™ programming, including academics, athletes, health and safety professionals, post-secondary institution students and employees, theatre artists, and more.

PARTICIPANT QUOTE:

“My daughter had been in an unhealthy relationship for months. Because of what I learned in this course, I was able to: identify specific examples of what concerned me about her relationship, including instances of emotional abuse and gaslighting; help her understand the potential consequences of her decision to either continue or end the relationship; ask non-judgmental questions to help her better understand her situation; express concern without perpetuating victim-blaming attitudes towards her; and empower her to make her own decision to continue or end the relationship while letting her know that I would respect whatever decision she chose to make. This course has made me a better mom and has paved the way for me to support my daughter to have healthy relationships at her young age. Thank you again.”



We influenced over **7,500 individuals** with **Leading Change™** programming



Working with Men & Boys to End Gender-Based Violence

We all have a role to play in ending violence against women. Leading Change™ works with people of all genders, understanding that men and boys need to be part of the solution.

In 2022–2023, Leading Change™ launched a partnership with the Alberta Junior Hockey League, and all 16 teams in the AJHL received training that focused on building a strengths-based conversation among players about domestic and gender-based violence prevention. Over a total of 30 sessions, **the Leading Change™ team provided 461 young hockey players within the Alberta Junior Hockey League with the tools they need to begin leading the change to end domestic violence and abuse and contribute to a larger culture shift.** The second year of the partnership is currently underway, with young hockey players across the province currently engaged in a series of workshops that builds on the foundation established in the first year.

WORD FROM THE TRAINER:

Last year, we expanded our Leading Change™ program offerings from one team in the Alberta Junior Hockey League to all 16 teams and a total 461 players. We also continued our work with football teams at the minor and professional levels. When we first enter a locker room, some players don't know quite what to make of us but using our strengths-based approach, we build trust and camaraderie, and start having great conversations in no time.

Our program equips players to become an active part of ending gender-based violence and abuse. They are also better able to build their own healthy relationships and model positive behaviour in their communities. One of the captains told us he would never have imagined having conversations like these when he started playing hockey. He shared that Leading Change™ has changed his team's approach to working together, building more trust and leadership among them all. A football coach also noted a marked difference in the locker room conversation among his players and that the sessions had moved their team from having a good culture to a great culture.

Sports players are leaders in the communities where they live and play—leaders with influence to move the needle on gender equity. Our partnerships in sports equip these leaders to use their influence to create lasting change towards a world free from violence and abuse.

QUOTE FROM RYAN BARTOSHYK, AJHL COMMISSIONER:

"We believe that our players can use their position as role models and leaders in Alberta communities to contribute to positive change and promote anti-violence. The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters has provided our young athletes with education on abuse prevention, consent and assistance in identifying how they can model this leadership in their everyday lives. We thank the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters for their commitment to this initiative and look to continue our partnership in the upcoming 2023–2024 Season."

PARTICIPANT QUOTE:

"Very helpful in expanding and giving advice towards taking action to help reduce domestic violence in our communities. [It was] helpful [in supporting me] to be a role model in community for younger kids and others."

CONCLUSION

2022–2023 was a year of many challenges and great successes.

Through it all, domestic violence shelters across the province supported thousands of Albertans fleeing violence and abuse. ACWS is proud to be able to showcase the incredible impact their work has on the social fabric of Alberta.

We hope you are as inspired as we are by these stories. And we hope you join us in affirming that all Albertans deserve to live free from violence and abuse, and that every survivor should have access to the supports and resources they need as they journey toward safety and healing.

Alberta’s domestic violence shelters do innovative and essential work supporting domestic violence and abuse survivors and their children, and enacting transformational change throughout the province. But they cannot do it alone.

To help, consider donating to ACWS or to the domestic violence or seniors’ shelter in your community. We also encourage all Albertans to join the work of ending gender-based violence in their communities, and to advocate for the needs of survivors and the domestic violence shelters that support them.

For more information, please visit our website: <https://acws.ca/>

Contributors

Thank you to the sheltering organizations who contributed data for this 2022–2023 Data Release.

Big Hill Haven

Brooks and District Women’s Safe Shelter Society

Canadian Pakistani Support Group Association

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

Edmonton Women’s Shelter Ltd.

Fairview and District Women’s Center Association

Grande Cache Transition House Society

Grande Prairie Women’s Residence Association

Heart Home Network *(formerly The Brenda Strafford Society for the Prevention of Domestic Violence)*

Hope Haven Society

Jessica Martel Memorial Foundation

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

Radiance Family Society *(formerly Sunshine Society of Christian Community Services)*

Rowan House Society

Safe Haven Women’s Shelter Society

Sage Seniors Association

Stepping Stones Crisis Society *(formerly Dr. Margaret Savage Crisis Center Society)*

Strathcona Shelter Society Ltd.

True North *(formerly Wheatland Crisis Society)*

Unison at Kerby Centre

Waypoints Community Services Association

Wellspring Family Resource & Crisis Centre Society

Wings of Providence Society

Yellowhead Emergency Shelter for Women Society

YWCA Calgary

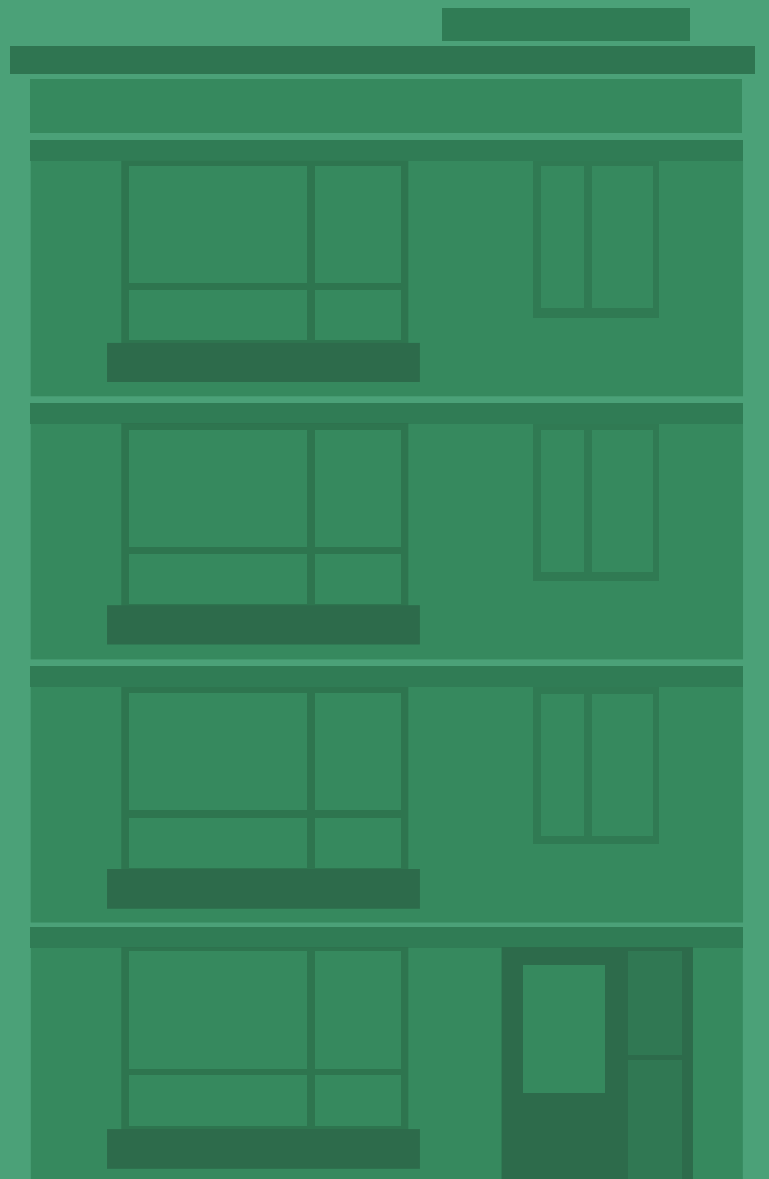
YWCA of Banff

YWCA of Lethbridge and District

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

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

ACWS

Alberta Council of
Women's Shelters

For more information,
visit our website at acws.ca

