



2023 BUDGET CONSULTATION

Recommendations from Members of the Ontario Coalition of Women's Shelter
and Housing Providers



FEBRUARY 10, 2023

ONTARIO COALITION OF WOMEN'S SHELTER AND HOUSING PROVIDERS
Ontario, Canada

Ontario Coalition of Shelter and Supportive Housing

February 10, 2023

Standing Committee on Finance & Economic Affairs

RE: 2023 Budget Consultations

Dear Standing Committee on Finance & Economic Affairs:

We are a coalition of shelter and supportive housing agencies serving women and gender diverse individuals in Ontario. This coalition of women's agencies provides vital and life-saving services for homeless women and women who are seeking more permanent forms of housing. In our respective communities, which span from the Greater Toronto Area, east to Ottawa and to northern Ontario including Simcoe Muskoka and Sudbury, we provide much needed shelter, supportive housing, case management and mental health and addictions support services to women who are marginalized and disenfranchised. We are not only providing necessary social and health supports, but we are also saving lives. Together, this coalition provides shelter and housing to over 5,000 women and gender diverse individuals annually across Ontario.

We request the Committee's consideration of the following for the 2023-24 Budget:

- o Commit **15 percent of the community mental health budget** for homeless women, specifically for women living in shelters and supportive housing.
- o **Allocate 30 percent of Ontario's capital funding targeted for affordable housing for low-income** and homeless women and **make this capital available to not-for-profit organizations only.**
- o **Increase the ODSP and OW rates so that it is 10 percent above the minimum basket measure.**

We would be pleased to discuss these issues and needs in more detail to the Standing Committee on Finance & Economic Affairs. We can be reached at executivedirector@streethaven.com and PH: 416-906-1325.

Sincerely,

Cornerstone Housing for Women
Day Break
Ernestine's
Elizabeth Fry Society of Ottawa
Harmony House Women's Shelter
John Howard Society Of Ottawa
Minwaashin Lodge
Neillie's
Street Haven

c.c. Hon. S. Jones, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health
Hon. M. Fullerton, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
Hon. S. Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Mental Health

Since the onset of the pandemic, the demand for shelter, supportive housing, and mental health and addictions supports have escalated for women. Social distancing and public health lockdowns took a toll on our clients. Increased severity and incidence of mental illness have become a common trend and pattern across our various cities. Some of the most common diagnoses include anxiety, depression, psychosis, and bipolar disorder. Unfortunately, this has resulted in an increase in violence, self-harm and even death among our clients. The majority of the coalition members are not funded to have any internal mental health workers. This becomes a significant issue when you have congregate settings in which up to 100 percent of clients have some form of mental illness diagnoses but there is no in-house capacity in the shelter and in the supportive housing to support those needs. It creates an explosively unsafe environment for clients and for staff. We need the province's commitment to dedicate at minimum 15 percent of the community mental health budget for women's services.

Housing

Women's shelter and supportive housing has been left out of the housing crisis conversations. There has been no acknowledgement that a gendered approach to investments in social housing is needed. Women have specific needs and those needs are a reflection of gender. This includes acknowledging that the majority of the women we serve, in shelter, in supportive and transitional and affordable housing have experienced some form of gender-based violence. These experiences require a more focused approach to housing. Moreover, in nearly every setting that we operate in, the housing crisis has created significant challenges for women who are housing insecure including those who are homeless. We ask that a dedicated allocation of 30 percent of Ontario's capital funding be set aside for affordable housing for low-income and homeless women and to make this capital available only to not-for-profit organizations only. We agencies are very capable of implementing and making available affordable housing for women rapidly and we can add quality housing stock to the Ontario sector. Many of the coalition members



including Street Haven and Cornerstone for Women have the capacity to further expand their housing stock within a 12 to 24 month period in order to counter the extremely long wait lists for affordable social housing in many of the cities we operate in.

Social Assistance

Lastly, affordability has contributed to the homeless crisis in Ontario. The inability to pay for rent has resulted in an ever-growing number of first-time shelter users in our shelters across the Province. At Street Haven, nearly 70 percent of clients are first time shelter users. This reflects the intersection between housing, income security and gender. The majority of our clients are living in deep poverty. They collect ODSP and OW and yet are still having to use shelters because they cannot afford rent. Affordable housing rent leaves very little income to address food insecurity and the other necessities of life. Women are being left behind, and the gap between those who are able to afford housing and those who are not, is widening at an alarming rate for homeless women. To enable our clients to thrive and become successful, we must strengthen the means by which they can succeed. This means lifting them above poverty. Increase the ODSP and OW rates so that it is 10 percent above the minimum basket measure.

We would be pleased to discuss these issues and needs in more detail to the Standing Committee on Finance & Economic Affairs. We can be reached at executivedirector@streethaven.com and PH: 416-906-1325.