

Women's Interval Home

Needs Assessment for Transitional Housing for
Women and Children Fleeing Domestic Violence

Final

April 18, 2022

Prepared By:



Summary of Key Findings

In 2020/21, Women's Interval Home had shelter admissions of 120 women and 51 children (171 total admissions). Between 2016 to 2021, the Women's Interval Home served between 102 and 115 different women and their children each year. In 2020/21, 105 different women and their children accessed shelter from Women's Interval Home. This was lower than in 2019/20, when 112 women accessed shelter. The lower number may be a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as many women's shelters experienced a temporary reduction in demand during over the same period, despite domestic violence and femicide increasing overall¹. Many of these women and their children, as well as likely some who received non-residential services, would benefit from transitional housing, particularly those who are at risk of danger post-separation and need additional time and support to heal from their trauma and rebuild their lives.

Just over two-thirds (68%) of women who stayed at Women's Interval Home in 2020/21 were single, or without children staying with them. This suggests that approximately 57% of the spaces in transitional housing should be targeted at single women, but there is also a need for spaces for women one to two children (28%) as well as the need to accommodate larger households (15%).

Approximately 22% of the women served in the past five years identified as Indigenous. This points to a need for Women's Interval Home to ensure the transitional housing is culturally safe and culturally appropriate services are integrated into the service offerings. The profile of women and their children accessing residential facilities for victims of abuse across Canada also points to the need for culturally-safe services for 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, as well as services that are accessible and appropriate for women without permanent residency, who are unable to speak English, visible minorities, and women with disabilities. The data also suggests that women served in shelter and transitional housing may include seniors experiencing age-related health conditions, including mobility impairments and Alzheimer's and dementia.

The shelter's annual occupancy rate in 2020/21 was 67%. The shelter had to place 29 women on its priority waiting list in 2020/21 due to the shelter being at capacity. The shelter's occupancy rates were likely lower in 2020/21, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Occupancy rates were significantly higher in each of the four previous years, including occupancy rates of 85%, 92% and 90% in 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20, respectively. Average occupancy rates above 80% suggests that were many instances when women could not be served as a result of capacity. Having transitional housing would help address the issue of the shelter sometimes being at capacity and unable to accommodate women and their children seeking shelter. Fleeing an abusive relationship takes strength and courage, as the moments after women and children flee an abusive relationship is the most dangerous time for them. It is therefore crucial that housing options and support services, such as shelter and transitional housing, be available so that women and children fleeing abusive relationships have somewhere safe to go.

There is currently no transitional housing for women and children fleeing violence in Lambton County. The nearest transitional housing for women and children fleeing violence is a duplex located in Strathroy (70km from Sarnia). The duplex is operated by The Women's Rural Resource Centre and provides second stage housing to women moving out of its shelter who require continued security and support.

¹ Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses

A range of data on housing supply in demand points to gap in supply of affordable housing in Lambton County. Based on the 2016 Census, 3,545 households were renting and living in housing that is unsuitable, inadequate, or unaffordable, are not receiving rental assistance and need affordable rental housing. In addition, Point-In-Time homelessness count data shows that there is an estimated 345 households currently experiencing homelessness. Altogether, 3,890 households currently lack affordable rental housing in Lambton County but need affordable rental housing. This undeniably creates barriers for survivors to leave their abusers. This makes transitional housing for women and their children fleeing domestic violence even more integral to meeting the needs of these women and children.

Women's Interval Home generally only permits a six week stay. However, finding alternative housing within this timeframe can be challenging for residents. Women leave Women's Interval Home for a variety of housing and other destinations upon discharge. Women's Interval Home's data on housing destination at discharge suggests that a minimum of approximately half of the women leaving shelter, including many of those leaving to stay with family or friends, those moving to transitional housing for youth, many of those renting a room, some of those moving to market rental housing, and some of those returning to their abuser, could benefit from transitional housing.

Based on the assumption that approximately half of the women leaving shelter could benefit from transitional housing, approximately 54 women could benefit from transitional housing each year (based on an average of 108 women accessing shelter each year). Applying national average turnover rates (3.89 women per year), would translate into a need for a minimum of 14 units of transitional housing.

Several factors suggest that demand could be even higher than 14 units. For example, the 14 unit minimum does not consider the number of women who were not served in shelter because of limited capacity, the women who did not stay in shelter, but who may still benefit from transitional housing, nor does it include a vacancy factor to ensure availability when it is needed. Therefore, the total need for transitional housing is likely to be in the range of 15-18 units.

Table of Contents

1.0 Introduction 5

2.0 Women and Children Fleeing Domestic Violence..... 6

 2.1 Local Information 6

 2.2 National Information 8

3.0 Housing Targeted toward Women and Children Fleeing Domestic Violence..... 12

 3.1 Local Information 12

 3.2 National Information 13

4.0 Other Housing Available to Women and Children Fleeing Domestic Violence 15

5.0 Housing Challenges of Women and Children Fleeing Domestic Violence 19

 5.1 Local Information 19

 5.2 National Information 21

6.0 Population-Based Estimates of Need for Residential Services for Women and Children Fleeing Domestic Violence 22

7.0 Service Needs..... 22

 7.1 Local Information 22

 7.2 National Information 22

8.0 Conclusions on Estimated Need for Transitional Housing Targeted toward Women and Children Fleeing Domestic Violence 25

1.0 Introduction

Women's Interval Home of Sarnia and Lambton Inc. is interested in developing transitional housing for women and children fleeing domestic violence to better serve residents exiting its emergency shelter. Its initial vision is to develop approximately 15-20 units.

This document provides a needs assessment for transitional housing for women and children fleeing domestic violence in the County of Lambton to inform any future developments by Women's Interval Home. The needs assessment is based on the collection and analysis of existing data on the need for transitional housing.

Women's Interval Home

The Women's Interval Home of Sarnia and Lambton Inc. is a non-profit charitable organization established in 1977 to provide emergency shelter and counselling services to abused women and their children in Sarnia-Lambton. The Women's Interval Home provides 24 hours emergency and short-term shelter, support, individual and group counselling, transitional services, housing support services and child witness counselling services. By working in collaboration with local partners the Women's Interval Home strives to end the cycle of violence against women in our society.

County of Lambton

The transitional housing would primarily serve the County of Lambton. The County of Lambton is a located in Southwestern Ontario, with a population of 128,154². The County of Lambton includes the City of Sarnia as well as a 10 smaller urban and more rural municipalities, including:

- Township of St. Clair
- Municipality of Lambton Shores
- Town of Plympton-Wyoming
- Town of Petrolia
- Township of Warwick
- Township of Enniskillen
- Township of Brooke-Alvinston
- Village of Point Edward
- Township of Dawn-Euphemia
- Village of Oil Springs.

Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence, also known as spousal or domestic violence, is a prevalent form of gender-based violence. It refers to multiple forms of harm caused by a current or former intimate partner or spouse. Intimate partner violence can happen in many forms of relationships, including:

- within a marriage, common-law or dating relationship
- regardless of the gender and sexual orientation of the partners
- at any time during a relationship and even after it has ended

² Statistics Canada, Census, 2021

- whether or not partners live together or are sexually intimate with one another

Domestic Violence can be defined as physical, sexual or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse as well as by other family members, or by a partner's family members.

Transitional Housing for Women and Children Fleeing Domestic Violence

A continuum of supports is required to address the needs of intimate partner violence. Transitional housing, also referred to as second stage housing, is an integral aspect of the continuum of supports. This housing is a form of transitional supportive housing for survivors of intimate partner violence who are at risk of danger post-separation and need additional time and support to heal from their trauma and rebuild their lives. Transitional housing for survivors of intimate partner violence are often affiliated or connected to violence against women emergency shelters and were created out of an identified need for safe and affordable longer-term housing with accompanying provisions for intimate partner violence survivors. Transitional housing offers wrap-around support and affords survivors additional time and space to heal, develop independence, establish long-term goals, build community and networks of support, access programming, and transition to a life free from violence. They typically provide longer term accommodation to women and children, usually between a few months and up to two years.

2.0 Women and Children Fleeing Domestic Violence

2.1 Local Information

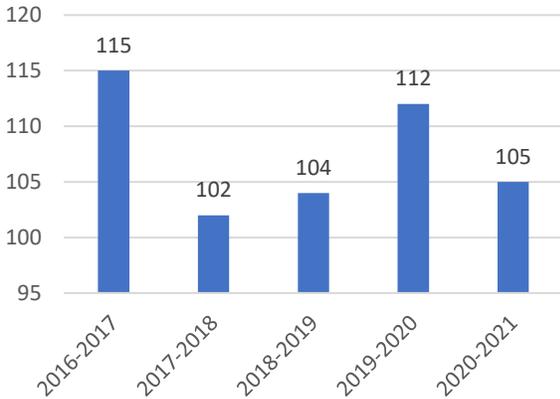
Number of Women and their Children Accessing Residential Facilities and other Services for Women and Children Fleeing Domestic Violence

From April 2020 to March 2021, Women's Interval Home responded to 875 crisis calls. It supported women in creating 174 safety plans. A total of 120 women and 51 children were admitted to shelter. Of the 120 admissions of women to shelter, 105 admissions were for unique clients. Fifteen admissions were for clients staying more than once. Women's Interval Home also provided non-residential services to 105 women and 44 children. Six clients were served via outreach services.

Many of these 105 women and their children who stayed in shelter, as well as likely some who received non-residential services, would benefit from transitional housing.

The number of unique women accessing shelter in 2021/21 was lower than 2019/20, when 112 women accessed shelter. This decrease may be attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many women's shelters saw a temporary decrease in the number of women seeking shelter during this time.

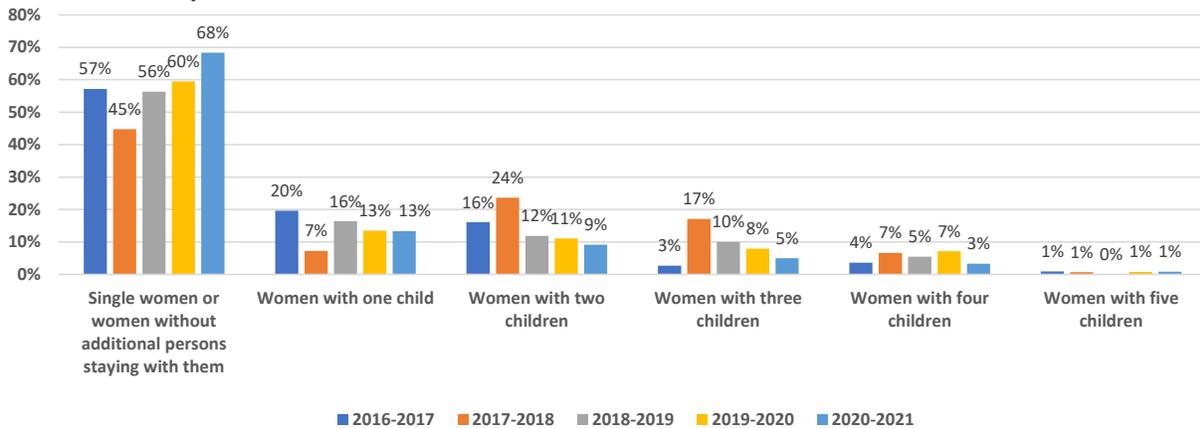
Unique Women Accessing Shelter at Women's Interval Home, 2016-2021



Profile and Women and their Children Accessing Residential Facilities for Women and Children Fleeing Domestic Violence

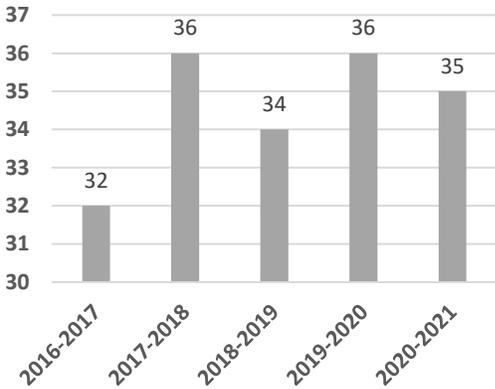
Just over two-thirds (68%) of women who stayed at Women’s Interval Home in 2020/21 were single, or without children staying with them. The next largest groups were women with one child (13%) and women with two children (9%). This distribution of household sizes was largely consistent with the previous four years, but a somewhat higher proportion were single women. This suggests that the majority of the spaces (approximately 57%) in transitional housing should be targeted at single women, but there is also a need for spaces for women one to two children as well as the need to accommodate larger households.

Household composition of Women’s Interval Home shelter clients 2016-2021



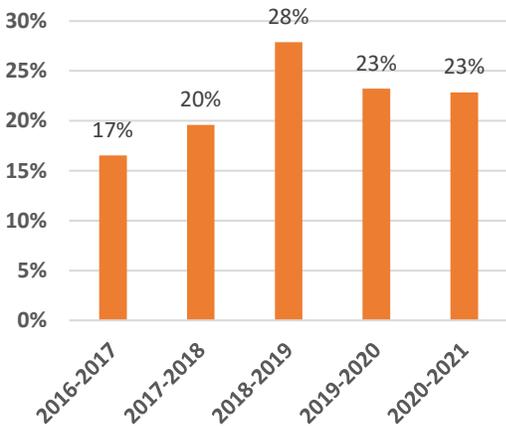
The average age of the women served in shelter in 2021/21 was 35 years old. Average ages have ranged from 32 in 2016/17 to 36 in 2017/18 and 2019/20.

Average Age of Women Served in Shelter, 2016-2021



Twenty-four women, or 23% of the women, served in 2020/21 identified as Indigenous. This has ranged from as low as 17% in 2016/17 to as high as 25% in 2018/19. [This points to a need for Women’s Interval Home to ensure the transitional housing is culturally safe and culturally appropriate services are integrated into the service offerings.](#)

Percent of Women Served in Shelter Who Identified as Indigenous, 2016-2021



2.2 National Information

[Incidence Rate of Domestic Violence](#)

In Canada in 2019, 85,170 women aged 15 and over reported intimate partner violence to police³. Based on the County of Lambton’s population of women aged 15 and over as a proportion of the national figure, it is estimated that approximately 310 women aged 15 and over report intimate partner violence to police annually in the County of Lambton.

However, people who experience intimate partner violence often do not to report it to the police for a variety of reasons, including: fear of stigma/shame, the belief that abuse is a private matter, fear of court system intervention, or lack of trust in the criminal justice system.

³ Statistics Canada, Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces, 2018

Based on self-reported data, 12% of women in Canada report experiencing intimate partner violence in the past year⁴. Applying this figure to the County of Lambton’s population of women aged 15 and over, it is estimated that approximately 6,600 women experience intimate partner violence in the County of Lambton each year.

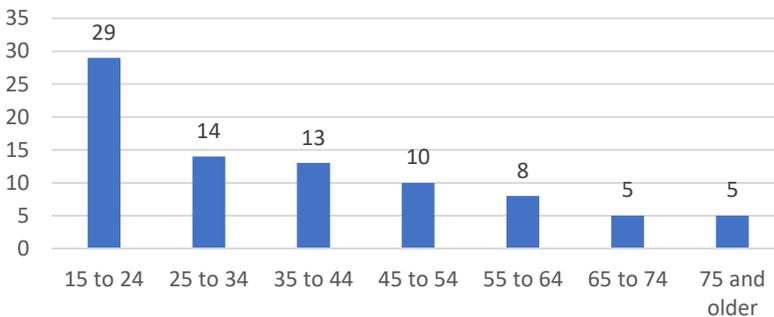
Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, domestic violence rates in Canada have increased up to 30%⁵.

Profile of Women and their Children Fleeing Violence

Intimate partner violence impacts people of all genders, ages, socioeconomic, racial, educational, ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. However, women account for the vast majority of people who experience this form of gender-based violence and it is most often perpetrated by men.

Women of certain characteristics are more likely to report intimate partner violence than others. Young women aged 15 to 24 are much more likely to self-report experiencing intimate partner violence than women of older age cohorts⁶.

Percent of Women Experiencing Intimate Partner Violence in the Past 12 Months, by Age



Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces, 2018

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and people of a sexual orientation that is not heterosexual (LGB+) women, Indigenous women, and women with a disability are more likely to report experiencing intimate partner violence⁷.

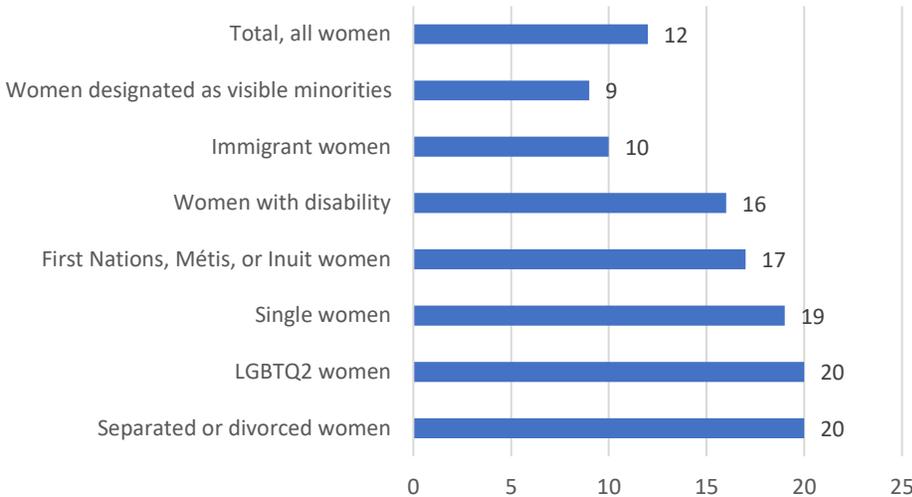
Percent of Women Experiencing Intimate Partner Violence in the Past 12 Months, by Selected Characteristics

⁴ Statistics Canada, Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces, 2018

⁵ As reported in Women’s Interval Home’s Annual Report 2020-2021

⁶ Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces, 2018

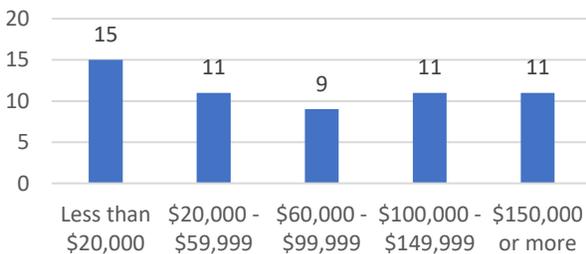
⁷ Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces, 2018



Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces, 2018

Women of all incomes experience intimate partner violence⁸.

Percent of Women Experiencing Intimate Partner Violence in the Past 12 Months, by Income



Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces, 2018

Profile and Women and their Children Accessing Residential Facilities for Women and Children Fleeing Domestic Violence

Based on Statistics Canada’s Survey of Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse, of the admissions to residential facilities for victims of abuse across Canada, 60% were women and 40% were their accompanying children.

Over half, 54%, of the women residing in residential facilities for victims of abuse had parental responsibilities. Of the women with parental responsibilities in transitional housing, 86% were admitted with one or more of their children, compared to 71% of women in short-term facilities⁹.

Of the women staying in residential facilities for reasons of abuse on snapshot day who reported their age, the large majority (76%) were under the age of 45, while women aged 30 to 44 represented 43% of residents¹⁰.

⁸ Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces, 2018

⁹ Statistics Canada, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse, 2018

¹⁰ Statistics Canada, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse, 2018

Of those accompanying children whose ages were reported, 41% were aged 4 or younger and 40% were aged 5 to 11¹¹. Children aged 12 to 14 accounted for 10% of accompanying children, while children aged 15 and older accounted for 6%.

More than one in five (22%) women aged 18 and over, and one in four (25%) children residing in facilities for victims of abuse were Indigenous¹².

Of the women whose residency status was known, 9% identified as non-permanent residents, a rate six times higher than their representation in the overall population¹³. Non-permanent residency often carries additional barriers to accessing affordable and safe housing, including lower average incomes, less stable housing and employment, financial interdependence, and a lack of awareness of available services¹⁴. Similarly, these barriers may impact the ability of victims of abuse to seek alternative housing options or to make long-term plans when living with their abuser.

Approximately 8% of women were unable to speak at least one official language¹⁵.

Almost one quarter (23%) of women were reported as visible minorities¹⁶.

More than one in ten, (13%) of women had a disability¹⁷. It should be noted, however, that this number may be lower than would otherwise have been seen as a result of accessibility limitations and lack of specialized services to meet the needs of persons with certain disabilities.

The profile of women and their children accessing residential facilities for victims of abuse across Canada points to the need for the approximately 60% of the units in transitional housing to be for single women and 40% for women accompanied by one or more children. It also points to the need for culturally-safe services for Indigenous women and their children and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, as well as services that are accessible and appropriate for women without permanent residency, who are unable to speak English, visible minorities, and women with disabilities. The data also suggests that women served in shelter and transitional housing may include seniors experiencing age-related health conditions, including mobility impairments and Alzheimer's and dementia.

¹¹ Statistics Canada, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse, 2018

¹² Statistics Canada, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse, 2018

¹³ Statistics Canada, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse, 2018

¹⁴ Source: Baker and Tabibi 2017; Tencer 2018

¹⁵ Statistics Canada, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse, 2018

¹⁶ Statistics Canada, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse, 2018

¹⁷ Statistics Canada, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse, 2018

3.0 Housing Targeted toward Women and Children Fleeing Domestic Violence

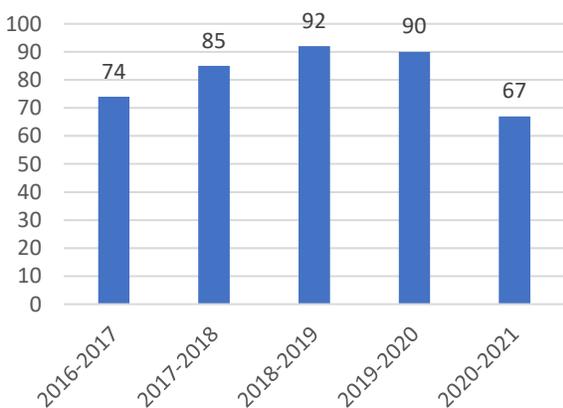
3.1 Local Information

Emergency Shelter Beds and Transitional Housing for Women and Children Fleeing Domestic Violence

Women’s Interval Home currently has 17 shelter beds. Out of a total of 4,136 possible adult bednights in 2021/21, women used 2,356 bednights. The shelter’s annual occupancy rate in 2020/21 was 67%. The shelter had to place 29 women on its priority waiting list in 2020/21 due to the shelter being at capacity.

The shelter’s occupancy rates were likely lower in 2020/21 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, despite domestic violence and femicide increasing overall¹⁸. Occupancy rates were significantly higher in each of the four previous years, including occupancy rates of 85%, 92% and 90% in 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20, respectively. Average occupancy rates above 80% suggests that were many instances when women could not be served as a result of capacity.

Women’s Interval Home Shelter Occupancy Rates (Percent), 2016-2021



Women’s Interval Home Shelter Occupied Bednights and Bednight Capacity (Adults), 2016-2021

	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
Total occupied bednights	2,437	3,087	3,159	2,856	2,356
Total available bednights	4,612	5,265	5,686	5,559	4,136

Having transitional housing would help address the issue of the shelter sometimes being at capacity and unable to accommodate women and their children seeking shelter. Fleeing an abusive relationship takes strength and courage, as the moments after women and children flee an abusive relationship is the most dangerous time for them. It is therefore crucial that housing options and support services, such as shelter

¹⁸ Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses

and transitional housing, be available so that women and children fleeing abusive relationships have somewhere safe to go.

Women's Interval Home is the only shelter for women and children fleeing violence in Lambton county. There are no transitional housing beds for women and children fleeing violence in Lambton county. There is one other shelter for women and children fleeing violence within 50km of Sarnia, the Three Fires Ezhignowenmindwaa Women's Shelter, on Walpole Island First Nation.

The only provider of transitional housing for women and children fleeing domestic violence located within 100km of Sarnia is the Women's Rural Resource Centre, located in Strathroy (70 km from Sarnia), which has a mix of shelter and transitional beds. It is a small facility. The Women's Rural Resource Centre purchased a duplex in 1999 to provide second stage housing to women moving out of its shelter who required continued security and support¹⁹. In 2020/21, the Women's Rural Resource Centre provided shelter to 21 women and 25 children²⁰. In 2019/20, 57 women were admitted to shelter²¹.

The further away the next transitional housing is, the less chance there is that a women will consider seeking service there. Few women from Lambton County would likely consider seeking transitional housing in Strathroy.

3.2 National Information

Rates of Women and their Children Accessing Residential Facilities for Women and Children Fleeing Domestic Violence

In 2018, there were 68,000 admissions to residential facilities for victims of abuse across Canada²². On a per capita basis, this would be equivalent to 236 admissions in Lambton County.

On the snapshot day of April 18, 2018, a total of 3,565 women, 3,137 accompanying children, were residing in residential facilities for reasons of abuse. On a per capita basis, this would be equivalent to 12 women and 11 children in Lambton County.

Just under half (45%) of the women residents were first-time clients, while 24% had previously received service on an outreach basis only and 7% had previously received service as a resident in the last year. Therefore, the majority of the 68,000 admissions across Canada were for different individuals. If we were to assume that 90% of admissions were for unique individuals, 61,200 different individuals would have accessed residential facilities for reasons of abuse. On a per capita basis, this would be equivalent to 212 unique individuals in Lambton County.

Many of these 212 women and children would benefit from transitional housing, particularly those who are at risk of danger post-separation and need additional time and support to heal from their trauma and rebuild their lives.

¹⁹ Women's Rural Resource Centre, Strategic Plan 2020-2023

²⁰ Women's Rural Resource Centre, Annual Report, 2020/21

²¹ Women's Rural Resource Centre, Annual Report, 2019/20

²² Statistics Canada, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse, 2018

Emergency Shelter Beds for Women and Children Fleeing Domestic Violence

The Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse identified a total of 6,500 funded emergency shelter beds across Canada for victims of abuse in 2018. The average facility had 15.2 beds. On a per capita basis, this would be equivalent to 23 beds in the County of Lambton.

On the snapshot day of April 18, 2018, 4,370 women and children were staying in emergency shelter beds for victims of abuse. On a per capita basis, this would be equivalent to 15 women and children in the County of Lambton.

Transitional Housing for Women and Children Fleeing Domestic Violence

The Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse identified 1,314 transitional housing units for victims of abuse across Canada. Facilities had an average of 11 units. On snapshot day, 2,332 residents were residing in transitional housing units. On a per capita basis, this would be equivalent to eight women and children in the County of Lambton. There was an average of 1.8 residents per unit. This would mean that on a per capita basis, five units would be occupied in the County of Lambton.

This means that just to reach the average service level provided in other communities across the Country, the County of Lambton should have five units of transitional housing for women and children fleeing domestic violence. This number, however, does not represent the full extent of need for transitional housing for women and children fleeing domestic violence. It is widely recognized that the supply of shelter beds and transitional housing units across the Country is insufficient to meet demands. Statistics Canada's Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse reported that on snapshot day 669 women were turned away (mostly due to capacity) across Canada²³. Almost every witness told the House of Commons' Standing Committee on the Status of Women reviewing the gap between the need and available beds in shelters and transitional housing for women and children fleeing violence that shelters and transitional housing often turn away women and children fleeing violence because of a lack of space²⁴.

In the majority (66%) of transitional housing facilities, residents stay for an average of nine months or more²⁵. The average unit serves 3.89 women per year.

²³ Statistics Canada, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse, 2018

²⁴ House of Commons' Standing Committee on the Status of Women, FEWO Committee Report, accessed at: <https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/42-1/FEWO/report-15/page-42>

²⁵ Statistics Canada, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse, 2018

4.0 Other Housing Available to Women and Children Fleeing Domestic Violence

The following data on other housing available to women and children fleeing domestic violence provides information on the availability of other housing to meet their needs. It is crucial that women and children fleeing domestic violence have safe housing options to increase their ability to leave their abusers.

Tenure

Most of Lambton County's households own their own homes (74.5%), while just over one quarter rent (25.5%)²⁶ Based on self-declared information from the Census, 14.1% (1,910 of 13,575) renter households live in subsidized rental housing.

Vacancy Rates

In 2021, the overall vacancy rates for purpose-built apartments was 2.2%²⁷ This is well below what is considered a healthy rental market (3%), and suggests limited availability of rental housing for women and children fleeing domestic violence to transition into.

Recent Housing Creation

There has been limited creation of rental housing in recent years. The Housing and Homelessness Needs report prepared to inform the County of Lambton's Housing and Homelessness Plan Review reported that over the five-year period from 2014 to 2018, an average of 293 housing units were completed per year in Lambton County²⁸. Data on completions by intended market was only available up to 2017. For the five year period from 2013 to 2017, 1,303 housing units were completed and 217 of these were intended for the rental market (16.7%).

Various versions of affordable housing capital programs have been used to increase the supply of affordable rental housing in Lambton County since 2006. There have been 16 developments funded under these programs, generating 212 new affordable rental housing units¹⁵. The average rents in the developments are required to be a maximum of 80% of the Average Market Rent in Lambton County for units with the same number of bedrooms.

²⁶ Statistics Canada, Census, 2016

²⁷ CMHC, Rental Market Survey Report, 2021

²⁸ Vink Consulting, Housing and Homelessness Needs Report; A Report to Inform the County of Lambton Housing and Homelessness Plan – Review and Update, 2020

Community Housing and Wait List for Rent-Geared-to-Income Assistance

The County of Lambton provides housing assistance to over 2,000 residents²⁹. This includes households in the over 1,300 social housing units. As of October 2019, 547 households were on the wait list for Rent-Geared-to-Income assistance, which results in rents that are typically set at 30% of the household's income. The wait list has grown over the past five years, from 324 households at the end of 2014.

In Ontario, survivors of domestic violence who have been abused by someone they are living with or have lived with can receive priority access to rent-geared-to-income social housing under the Special Priority Policy (SPP) category. In 2015 in the County of Lambton, applicants under the SPP category waited an average of three months to obtain housing³⁰. Wait times for applicants under the SPP category have no doubt increased since 2015 along with the overall number of households on the wait list.

The SPP category for access to rent-geared-to-income social housing is one source of affordable housing for women fleeing violence, but there can be barriers to qualifying under the SPP category. Women applying for the SPP category must provide a record to verify that the member has been abused. The regulation sets out a list of records of abusive behaviour (e.g., a record of police intervention indicating that the member was abused etc.) that may be used to verify that the member has been abused. A record of abuse must be prepared by one of the individuals identified in regulation, referred to as verifiers of abuse (e.g., physicians, lawyers, counsellors, etc.). The request to be included in the SPP category must be made in writing by someone who is 16 years or older and include written consent enabling the Service Manager to access information or documents to verify that a member of the household has been abused. A wide-range of stakeholders have raised concerns that the current SPP category is difficult to access for some households³¹.

Supportive Housing

There are several supportive housing options for persons with special needs within the County of Lambton. Overall there are, at a minimum, 568 supportive housing units/beds (including people living in their own home) for people with living with mental health illness and people with physical and developmental disabilities in Lambton County, although they all have wait lists³². None of these units are targeted at women and children fleeing violence.

Housing Assistance and Supports

Lambton County has four different types of programs that provide housing assistance and supports to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Only two are focused on adults. These two programs

²⁹ Vink Consulting, Housing and Homelessness Needs Report; A Report to Inform the County of Lambton Housing and Homelessness Plan – Review and Update, 2020

³⁰ Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association, 2016 Waiting List Survey Report, 2016

³¹ Government of Ontario, Amendments to O. Reg. 367/11 under the Housing Services Act, 2011, accessed at: [https://www.ontariocanada.com/registry/view.do?postingId=24442&language=en#:~:text=The%20Special%20Priority%20Policy%20\(SPP,with\)%2C%20or%20by%20someone%20sponsoring](https://www.ontariocanada.com/registry/view.do?postingId=24442&language=en#:~:text=The%20Special%20Priority%20Policy%20(SPP,with)%2C%20or%20by%20someone%20sponsoring)

³² Vink Consulting, Housing and Homelessness Needs Report; A Report to Inform the County of Lambton Housing and Homelessness Plan – Review and Update, 2020

have a total of 46 spaces and provide transitional housing and permanent Intensive Case Management and affordability assistance in private rental housing³³.

Housing Assistance and Supports for People Experiencing or At Risk of Homelessness, Lambton County

Service Provider	Type of Service	Population Served	Number of Units / Caseload Capacity	Occupancy/ Fill Rate 2018	Clients Served 2018	Intake
Rebound	Transitional housing	Youth	7	Varies	27	Intake at Agency
Good Shepherd's Lodge	Transitional housing	Adults	16	80%	N/A	Intake at Agency
Lambton Elderly Outreach	Subsidy for supportive housing in a retirement home	Seniors	N/A	Varies	68	Hospital / treatment centre
Canadian Mental Health Association	Permanent Intensive Case Management and affordability assistance in private rental housing	Adults	30	100%	30	Inn of Good Shepherd
Balas Residential	Domiciliary hostel (long term and transitional housing to individuals that are in need of assistance living independently)	Youth	6	100%	6	Intake at Agency

Source: Vink Consulting, Housing and Homelessness Needs Report; A Report to Inform the County of Lambton Housing and Homelessness Plan – Review and Update, 2020

Housing Affordability

10,180 households were spending 30% or more of their income on housing costs in 2016³⁴. Of these, 4,090 were owners and 6,085 were renters. 3,375 of the owners spending 30% or more of their income on housing had a mortgage. 910 households were living in subsidized rental housing but were paying 30% or

³³ Vink Consulting, Housing and Homelessness Needs Report; A Report to Inform the County of Lambton Housing and Homelessness Plan – Review and Update, 2020

³⁴ Statistics Canada, Census, 2016

more of their income on housing. Of those renters not in subsidized housing, 5,175 were spending 30% or more of their income on shelter costs.

10.7% of owner households were spending 30% or more of their income on shelter costs in 2016, while 45.1% of renter households were spending 30% or more of their income on shelter³⁵.

34.5% of renter households were in core housing need in 2016 (4,455 households)³⁶. Affordability was the primary reason for being in core housing need. 32.8% of renter households fell below the affordability standard. Only 5.0% fell below the adequacy standard, and 1.8% fell below the suitability standard.

4.7% of owners were in core housing need in 2016 (1,755 households)³⁷. For almost all of these households, the issue was related to affordability.

Rental Housing Affordability

51% of renter households cannot afford the median market rent in Lambton County³⁸. 57% of renters cannot afford the median rent for a three-bedroom unit, 49% cannot afford the median two-bedroom rent, 43% cannot afford the median rent for one-bedroom and 38% cannot afford the median rent for a one-bedroom unit.

Renters with incomes in the bottom third of incomes are essentially priced out of the market, with only 10% of available units affordable to them. These units are generally bachelor and one-bedroom units, so larger households face particular difficulties finding lower cost housing. Approximately 4,656 households cannot afford the units at the starting rents.

Some 6,325 renter households with incomes below \$37,465 fall into the group of renters who cannot afford the median market rent. In other words, they require affordable rental housing. Some of these households already have their housing needs met either through social housing that is geared to their income or through affordable rental housing offered by the private market. Still, an estimated 3,545 renter households are living in housing that is unsuitable, inadequate, or unaffordable, are not receiving rental assistance that is geared to their income and need affordable rental housing²¹.

Current Gap and Future Needs for Affordable Rental Housing

In addition to the 3,545 households currently renting and living in housing that is unsuitable, inadequate, or unaffordable, are not receiving rental assistance and need affordable rental housing (discussed above), there is an estimated 345 households currently experiencing homelessness. Altogether, 3,890 households currently lack affordable rental housing but need affordable rental housing.

Slight growth in population is anticipated over the next 10 years. At the same time, some economic growth is anticipated, which has the potential to reduce the percentage of households in need of affordable housing. For the purposes of this estimate, we have assumed that these two factors will

³⁵ Statistics Canada, Census, 2016

³⁶ Statistics Canada, Census, 2016

³⁷ Statistics Canada, Census, 2016

³⁸ Statistics Canada, Census, 2016

cancel each other out and the number of households in need of affordable rental housing will remain constant at 3,890.

The above data points to a gap in supply of affordable housing in Lambton County. This undeniably creates barriers for survivors to leave their abusers. This makes transitional housing for women and their children fleeing domestic violence even more integral to meeting the needs of these women and children.

5.0 Housing Challenges of Women and Children Fleeing Domestic Violence

Women's ability to have their own long-term affordable residence is crucial to their ability to recover from abuse and build independent lives. However, some women face challenges in doing so.

5.1 Local Information

Housing Status Upon Discharge from Shelter

Women's Interval Home generally only permits a six week stay. However, finding alternative housing within this timeframe can be challenging for residents. Women leave Women's Interval Home for a variety of housing and other destinations upon discharge. Many would benefit from transitional housing, including many of those leaving to stay with family or friends, those moving to transitional housing for youth, many of those renting a room, some of those moving to market rental housing, and some of those returning to their abuser.

The largest group of women leaves the shelter to stay with family or friends. There are a number of reasons why women move in with family and friends, including relocating out of the area, pets or childcare concerns, because they could not secure a unit during their six week stay, because they were not eligible for social due to a full time job but could not afford market rent, and because they were unable to apply for priority access to social housing.

Twelve women secure market rental units upon discharge. This was most commonly done (5 women) when they were denied priority access to social housing based on incorrect time frames or could not apply for priority access based on not having proper documentation or not meeting the priority mandate. The next most common reason (3 women) was that they needed to secure immediate housing and did not want to wait for social housing. Two were working full time and did not apply for social housing. Others secured a roommate (1) or secured a subsidy through CMHA (1).

Women moving to a room rental at discharge did so because of poor credit, lack of references, did not want to sign lease because they were waiting for social housing and did not know how long they would have to wait, or their budget did not allow for a unit.

While some (6) of the ten women returning to their listed abuser in 2021 wanted to reconcile, others did so because they felt there were a lack of other options for financial reasons or because wait times for housing were too long.

Of the four women who were able to obtain social housing, two women had approximately a six week wait, another had a two month wait while waiting for a unit. Another women had applied previously for a Portable Housing Benefit in another community, and was able to secure the unit during their six week stay.

Housing Status of Residential Clients at Time of Discharge, 2021

Housing Status at Time of Discharge	Number	Percent
Stay with Family or Friends	20	28%
Secured Market Rent	12	17%
Non-Housing Destinations*	11	15%
Return to Listed Abuser	10	14%
Return Home without Partner	7	10%
Room Rental	5	7%
Social Housing	4	6%
Transitional Housing for Youth	3	4%
Total Known Destinations at Discharge	72	100%

*Includes 4 transferred to other shelters for safety, 4 discharged to hospital, and 3 to treatment

Does not include those who were involuntarily discharged to unknown locations

Source: Women's Interval Home

These numbers suggest that a minimum of approximately half of the women leaving shelter would benefit from transitional housing. Applying an average of 108 unique women leaving shelter each year based on the past five years, and national average turnover rates (3.89 women per year), would translate into a need for a minimum of 14 units of transitional housing.

Women Experiencing Homelessness for Reasons of Partner Abuse

The County of Lambton conducted a Homelessness Enumeration during the week of June 21-25, 2021. At the time of the enumeration, 352 people were experiencing homelessness (including 236 individuals who completed a survey, 89 people were observed to be experiencing homelessness and 27 children and dependent adults were identified)³⁹. It is important to note that this represents a snapshot in time, rather than the number of people who experience homelessness over the course of a year or longer. Among those surveyed, 37% identified as women. Available research underestimates the scale of women's homelessness in Canada. Because women are more likely to experience hidden homelessness, they are less likely to appear in shelters, drop ins, public spaces, or social services. This means that women are undercounted in data, research, and Homelessness Enumerations⁴⁰.

³⁹ County of Lambton, 2021, Homelessness Enumeration Fall 2021

⁴⁰ Women's National Housing & Homelessness Network, <https://womenshomelessness.ca/women-girls-homelessness-in-canada/>

In the County of Lambton's Homelessness Enumeration, 7% of respondents reported experiencing abuse by a spouse or partner as a cause for their current experience of homelessness. This includes people of all genders. It would be fair to assume at least 7% of women were experiencing homelessness as a result of abuse by a spouse or partner. This represents approximately 8 women identified during the homeless enumeration.

5.2 National Information

Over three quarters (77%) of residents of residential facilities for victims of abuse in Canada reported that they faced a lack of affordable, appropriate long-term housing upon departure. Half (50%) also report underemployment and low incomes among the top challenges they faced.

On snapshot day, 103 women and 30 accompanying children departed a facility, 94% of whom left short-term facilities. For 95 of those women, information was reported regarding their destination:

- 21% were returning to a residence where their abuser lived,
- 18% reported they were going to live with friends or relatives,
- 11% were entering another residential facility for victims of abuse and
- 8% were returning home without the abuser there.

For 36% of the women, either the facility or the women did not know where they were going upon departure from the facility.

Women Experiencing Homelessness for Reasons of Partner Abuse

It is estimated that more than 235,000 people experience homelessness in a year in Canada⁴¹. Based on the number of people in the County of Lambton as a proportion of the national population, this would mean that approximately 814 people experience homelessness in the County of Lambton over the course of a year.

Intimate partner violence is recognized as one of the leading causes of homelessness among women⁴². Approximately 25% of homeless women have identified domestic violence as being a major contributor to their homelessness⁴³. Domestic violence victimization has both direct and indirect pathways to homelessness. Many abusers intentionally destroy their victims' economic and housing stability by ruining their credit, stealing their money, destroying their property, or preventing them from working, as a means of trapping them in the relationship⁴⁴. Further, the domestic violence itself often leads to injuries, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and frequent absences from jobs or school, all of which can then contribute to homelessness⁴⁵. Sometimes, domestic violence survivors flee their homes and find new immediate housing, only to realize they can not afford it on their own⁴⁶.

⁴¹ Gaetz S, DeJ E, Richter T, Redman M. *The State of Homelessness in Canada 2016*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, 2016.

⁴² Baker, Billhardt, Warren, Rollins, & Glass, 2010; Rollins et al., 2012; U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2005

⁴³ Jasinski et al., 2002; Wilder Research Center, 2007

⁴⁴ Adams, Sullivan, Bybee, & Greeson, 2008; Adams, Tolman, Bybee, Sullivan, & Kennedy, 2012; Hahn & Postmus, 2014.

⁴⁵ Adams, Bybee, Tolman, Sullivan, & Kennedy, 2013; Lacey, McPherson, Samuel, Sears, & Head, 2013

⁴⁶ Galano, Hunter, Howell, Miller, & Graham-Bermann, 2013

6.0 Population-Based Estimates of Need for Residential Services for Women and Children Fleeing Domestic Violence

The Council of Europe recommends a minimum standard of one place in a women's shelter per 7,500 population⁴⁷. Applying this figure to the population of the County of Lambton, there should be approximately 14 places for women and children fleeing domestic violence. No similar benchmarks are available, in Canada or have been identified elsewhere, for transitional housing.

7.0 Service Needs

7.1 Local Information

Women's Interval Home currently provides a variety of programming, including:

- Transitional support to help women and their children plan for the future and secure housing
- Individual and group counselling
- Child witness counselling, and
- Social programming, including a youth relationship program, mother's support group, kids craft group.

Women's Interval Home has identified that many of its clients have experienced brain trauma and would like to make brain trauma recovery services available to its transitional housing residents.

7.2 National Information

There are a number of best practices related to the service provided in transitional housing for women and children fleeing domestic violence:

- Shelters and transitional housing should empower women to regain control in their lives and achieve their goals through counseling, support groups and case planning⁴⁸.
- Services should be based on the best interests and needs directly expressed by the affected woman. Women should have the right to self-determination and individual decision-making related to the services they receive and should be provided with information about services and resources in order to make informed decisions.
- Services should be responsive to the cultural, spiritual, and religious needs of women and their children and should address a wide range of challenges women may face through a combination

⁴⁷ Council of Europe, Group of Specialists for Combating Violence against Women (2000) Final Report of Activities of the EG-S-VL including a Plan of Action for Combating Violence against Women EG-S-VL (97) 1, p. 73.

⁴⁸ Gierman et al, ND

of direct service provision, individual advocacy, and participation in coordinated community responses to facilitate survivor access to services not provided on site⁴⁹

- Services should be appropriately tailored to the diverse needs of those seeking support. The support may include:
 - crisis intervention, risk assessment and safety planning.
 - Emotional support
 - medical treatment
 - counseling and therapeutic supports
 - financial and economic assistance
 - legal assistance
 - long-term housing support
 - counseling and related support for children accompanying their mothers
 - supporting women and children to navigate or access a variety of systems, including but not limited to justice, employment, housing supports, health, police, education, child welfare services, and traditional knowledge holders for Indigenous women⁵⁰
- Shelters should provide services that recognize the unique needs of children, which could include providing referrals to community services⁵¹
- Indigenous women and dependents should be connected with traditional knowledge holders, provided space for traditional practices, and provided information and referrals about culturally appropriate services, as requested by the women and dependents. Shelters should work collaboratively with First Nation communities, as well as urban Aboriginal organizations to establish effective and responsive policies, services and supports for Indigenous women and dependents⁵²
- Where feasible, services should be integrated into one location, such as a “one-stop crisis centre”. This may include access to health, counseling, legal and other services provided by multiple organizations in one location⁵³

Women’s Shelters Canada’s survey of domestic violence and second stage shelters in Canada found the following related to service provision in transitional housing:

- Of the 74 who responded to the question about types and frequency of counselling services offered at their shelters, 82% reported that they “often” provided counselling to individuals and 72% reported that they “often” provided group counselling
- Almost half (46%) reported “often” providing specific counselling to children who had been exposed to domestic violence

⁴⁹ Gierman et al, ND; MCCSS, ND

⁵⁰ Gierman et al, ND

⁵¹ Gierman et al, ND

⁵² MCCSS, ND

⁵³ Gierman et al, ND

- Almost all (67 of 74, or 91%) reported providing assistance navigate social assistance
- 85% reported “often” providing support to help residents find housing
- Two-thirds (51 of 74, or 69%) of respondents reported that they “often” provide support in accessing health services including help with setting up appointments and attending appointments
- Almost three-quarters (70%, 52 of 74) reported that they “often” provided support to help with legal issues
- Of the 73 who responded, 84% “often” provided support for mothers who come into contact with the child welfare system
- Although no second stage shelters reported having a dedicated addictions counsellor on-site (see Section 7), 43% (32 of 74) reported “often” and 43% “sometimes” providing these supports
- One-third (26 of 74, or 35%) reported that they “often” and 24% “sometimes” offered parenting programs for women residing in second stage shelters
- Of the 73 that responded, 49% of second stage shelters reported that they “often” and 29% “sometimes” offered school support to children (including school registration, speaking to teachers and school staff, and helping with homework)
- Nine second stage shelters (19%) reported having a childcare worker on-site.
- Close to one-third (22 of 72, or 31%) of respondents indicated that they could “often” and 32% “sometimes” offer some form of childcare
- While 67% reported serving Indigenous women, only 11% were able to “often” offer culturally appropriate programs⁵⁴

Traumatic Brain Injury is common amongst women survivors of intimate partner violence⁵⁵. Some 35-80% of women affected by intimate partner violence experience symptoms of traumatic brain injury⁵⁶. It is reported that up to 75% of women do not seek medical care for suspected brain injury⁵⁷. Survivors and care providers can also mistake brain injury symptoms for the emotional distress brought about by the abuse itself.

8.0 Access and Inclusion Needs

Based on the profiles of women and their children seeking shelter and experiencing domestic violence discussed above, consideration should be given to the following access and inclusion needs.

⁵⁴ Women’s Shelters Canada, 2019

⁵⁵ A. S. Ivany and D. Schminkey, “Intimate partner violence and traumatic brain injury: State of the science and next steps,” *Fam. Community Heal.*, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 129–137, 2016

⁵⁶ Kwako LE, Glass N, Campbell J, Melvin KC, Barr T, Gill JM. Traumatic brain injury in IPV: A critical review of outcomes and mechanisms. *Trauma Violence Abuse* 2011; 12:115–126

⁵⁷ A. S. Ivany and D. Schminkey, “Intimate partner violence and traumatic brain injury: State of the science and next steps,” *Fam. Community Heal.*, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 129–137, 2016

The over-representation of Indigenous women and children seeking services suggests the need for space for Indigenous women and children to engage in culture, transitional and holistic healing through:

- Space for Elders. Shared programming or office space for Elders to meet with individual or groups of women.
- Sacred spaces. Space for holistic healing, balcony or a ventilated room that can be used for smudging or pipe ceremonies.
- Communal living rooms. A living room like setting where users can socialize and build friendships.
- Indigenous artists. When possible, consider incorporating the work of local Indigenous artists or carvers into the construction and design of the space⁵⁸.

Intimate partner violence affects many 2SLGBTQ+ people. It will be important to create an inclusive space for both women and their children / teenagers. Private bedrooms and washrooms should be provided for those not comfortable sharing their personal space and gender neutral language should be used where possible.

Women leaving an abusive relationship often fear for the safety of their pets and service animals. Abusers may use animals to manipulate women to stay in a violent relationship or return to one. Ideally, women and children will not have to be separated from their animal. Designing housing to accommodate pets and service animals can help women to feel more at-home.

The space should be designed to ensure accessibility for women and their children with disabilities.

9.0 Considerations for Location

Good practice suggests that transitional housing should be located in proximity to services, employment, and existing social connections to support resident's regaining independence. Considerations should also be made as to whether the neighbourhood feels safe, particularly when women are walking with children.

10.0 Conclusions on Estimated Need for Transitional Housing Targeted toward Women and Children Fleeing Domestic Violence

Women's Interval Home's data on the number of women accessing shelter, and their housing destination at discharge, suggests the need for a minimum of 14 units of transitional housing for women and children fleeing domestic violence. However, a number of factors suggest that demand could be even higher than 14 units. For example, the 14 unit minimum does not consider the number of women

⁵⁸ BC Housing, Design Guidelines for Women's Safe Homes, Transition Houses, Second Stage Housing, and Long-Term Rental Housing, 2021 Update

who were not served in shelter because of limited capacity, the women who did not stay in shelter, but who may still benefit from transitional housing, nor does it include a vacancy factor to ensure availability when it is needed. Therefore, the total need for transitional housing is likely to be in the range of 15-18 units.