



POSITION ON Second Stage Housing For Women Leaving Abusive Relationships

Second Stage Shelters are desperately needed by women and children leaving emergency shelters in the province of Alberta. Research suggests “for every emergency shelter bed, there needs to be two or three second stage transitional beds.” In Alberta, there are currently 692 emergency beds and only 99 second stage apartments. This acute shortage does not take into consideration the scarcity of emergency shelter beds in certain parts of this province.

A survey conducted by the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters revealed a critical need for second stage shelters and affordable housing for women leaving emergency shelters. Emergency shelters provide safe accommodation for women and children fleeing abuse for up to 21 days, while second stage shelters provide safe accommodation with supportive programs for 6 months or more. This gives a woman much needed time to start healing from an abusive relationship and find the resources for income and shelter in order to make a safe home for her family.

Twenty shelters reported that over half of the women they serve need to access Second Stage Housing but the majority cannot be placed due to an acute shortage of second stage housing. In Edmonton, for example, there are 92 emergency beds, but only 29-second stage apartments. In Alberta, there are 692 emergency beds (413 funded by the provincial government) but only 297 second stage beds. A study of the Los Angeles shelter system suggests that, ideally, there should be two or three transitional housing beds for each crisis bed.¹ This means that Alberta has a shortfall of 1,089 to 1,779 beds. Considering the number of women who cannot be accommodated in shelters because they are full, the number of women who stayed in hotels as emergency accommodation and the tight Alberta housing market, the shortfall becomes even more significant.²

There is strong consensus amongst women's shelters that every community with an emergency shelter should have ready access to a second stage shelter. Based on the suggested formula of having two or three second stage beds for every emergency bed, Alberta falls short in its provision of safe, affordable housing for women leaving abusive relationships. Both government and community must acknowledge this reality and respond to the need by providing the funding and support for the creation of an adequate number of safe, affordable, accessible housing units for family members seeking to leave

¹ "A Report on Domestic Violence Shelters in the City and the County of Los Angeles,

² ACWS Submission to the Child Welfare Review Committee, 2002 pg.5

abusive relationships. Furthermore, an increase in Alberta Works rates is desperately needed to reflect the real cost of living; along with on-going funding for outreach and follow-up programs to assist anyone who is abused on the journey to healing, health and autonomy.

The provincial government does **not** have a funding program for second stage shelters. Only two of the eleven second stage housing programs receive partial funding from the Women's Shelter Program administered by Alberta Children's Services. The two on reserve second stage shelters do not receive one penny from the federal government. Ongoing sustainable funding is required for all second stage housing programs in Alberta, both on and off reserve.

While the Premier's Roundtable on Family Violence recognized the need to provide transitional support³, there is no timeline or commitment to make the much needed service a reality. The Federal Government has not addressed this need with respect to funding on reserve second stage shelters.

ACWS believes that second stage shelters need to be funded equitably across the province in accordance with our developed staffing and program model and this needs to happen now. Further, many more second stage shelter programs are needed.

The following table, *The Need for Second Stage Housing*, (Attachment 1) outlines the current shortfall in second stage housing for Alberta women and children in communities served by women's shelters. The calculations are based on the need for two to three transitional beds for each second stage shelter and an average family size of three based on experience of our existing second stage shelters. The locations marked with an asterisk are currently under construction but these shelters are considered as having second stage beds for the purposes of this report. Note that this calculation is based on current emergency beds with many larger centres unable to accommodate women needing their residential programs because they are full. The need, therefore, is much greater.

The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters will be writing to each municipality and band council requesting their support for provincial and federal involvement in the funding of second stage programming for abused women and children.

³ Framework for Action, Moving Community Consultation to Strategic Action, p. 23