



Recommendations to the Standing Committee on Finance Pre-budget consultation August, 2010

Canada is emerging with strength from the global recession. As such, we are well positioned to address some the needs of some of Canada's most vulnerable citizens, abused women and their children. The following recommendations will also enhance Canada's ability to meet its stated objective to end child poverty as well its international obligations under the Convention to Eliminate Discrimination Against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action.

1. Fund On-Reserve Shelters Based on Recommendations in the Johnson Report

In 2006, the federal government committed to an increase in funding for on reserve shelters. This announcement was welcomed by ACWS, as shelters funded through INAC have been perennially underfunded. However, since this announcement, little progress has been made and last spring Alberta shelters were informed by INAC representatives that their funding would be cut. Our calculations indicate that shelter funding should have increased over the last several years based on the recommendations of the federally commissioned Johnson Report, *Shelter Funding Methodology for the Family Violence Prevention Program*. Based on the funding methodology Alberta on reserve shelters are approximately 40% below recommended levels and again lag behind their provincially funded counterparts. It is our position that the Administrative Reform Agreement signed by the Alberta and Canadian governments should NOT affect INAC's funding formula for on reserve shelters in Alberta.

Two of Alberta's on reserve shelters also provide second stage transitional housing. Second stage programmes provide a secure, longer term environment to assist women and their children in transitioning out of an abusive relationship. Housing is at a premium on reserve; indeed many women couch surf (with their children) and have never known a home of their own. The two on reserve second stage shelters in Alberta struggle day to day to provide this needed program, without any financial support from INAC. This needs to end!

125 (a) Provide well-funded shelters and relief support for girls and women subjected to violence, as well as medical, psychological and other counselling services and free or low-cost legal aid, where it is needed, as well as appropriate assistance to enable them to find a means of subsistence;

Beijing Platform for Action

Although violence levels are high, financial support for prevention programmes to on reserve communities in Alberta is minimal; to say the least. \$850,900 spread across 42 reserves in Alberta. There needs to be a significant injection of funds to raise awareness and identify community based solutions.

2. Expansion of the Shelter Enhancement Programme

Expansion of the shelter Enhancement Programme is critical in order to provide sufficient funds to upgrade, construct and make shelters more energy efficient and accessible. Women's shelters are aging and there are more calls for funding than ever before. In addition, second stage housing for abused women and their children comes out of the same pot as emergency shelters. Adequate funding needs to be provided so that shelters are not placed on an ever growing waitlist.

3. Develop and invest in a National Action Plan on Violence Against Women patterned on the US Prevention of *Domestic Violence Act*

Develop and invest in a National Action Plan on Violence Against Women patterned on the US Prevention of *Domestic Violence Act* that ties funding to police and justice bodies to their collaboration with women's shelters and other domestic violence agencies and provide funds to women's shelters. Funds to address violence against women should not be tagged on as an after-thought to most government funding streams but deserves its own significant funding stream.

4. Maternal Health

Ottawa should match its \$1.1B commitment abroad to abused and vulnerable mothers in Canada. For women under the age of 45 years, intimate partner violence has a greater impact on health than any other risk factors, including obesity, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and illicit drug use." (Cherniak et al., 2005). We know that in Alberta, 30% of women participating in the Healing Journey Study were abused during all their pregnancies; 47% for some of their pregnancies. According to Statistics Canada, 4.8% of children in Alberta have a reported disability, yet the Healing Journey study of women who have left abusive relationships report 35.1% had children with a disability, long-term illness and/or special needs and 7.4% have had a child die. In addition, many children exposed to domestic violence have also been physically or sexually abused by the abusive parent, most often fathers (Edleson, 1999; Farmer & Owen).

5. Fund programme resources for Aboriginal and Immigrant Women fleeing domestic violence

Specialized funding is needed for women's shelters to ensure appropriate programming resources and supports for families from aboriginal and immigrant/refugee communities. This would include training and support material to inform abused women of their rights under Canadian law when they come to shelter, as well as funding to cover interpretation services that recognize the woman's need for confidentiality and a knowledge of the dynamics of abuse.

6. Pensions for Shelter Workers

Ensure adequate funding for the Canada pension plan as many shelter workers do not have the benefit of private pension plans and have contributed to the safety of women through their low wages and lack of benefits.

7. Domestic violence response units for the RCMP

Additional funding is required to support community collaborative response units to domestic violence in rural communities in order to link families to appropriate services and support victims.

Submitted by the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters

For more information contact:

Jan Reimer

Provincial Co-ordinator

Alberta Council of Women's Shelters

320, 10310 Jasper Avenue

Edmonton, Alberta T5J 2W4

Phone (780)456-7000

janreimer@acws.ca

www.acws.ca