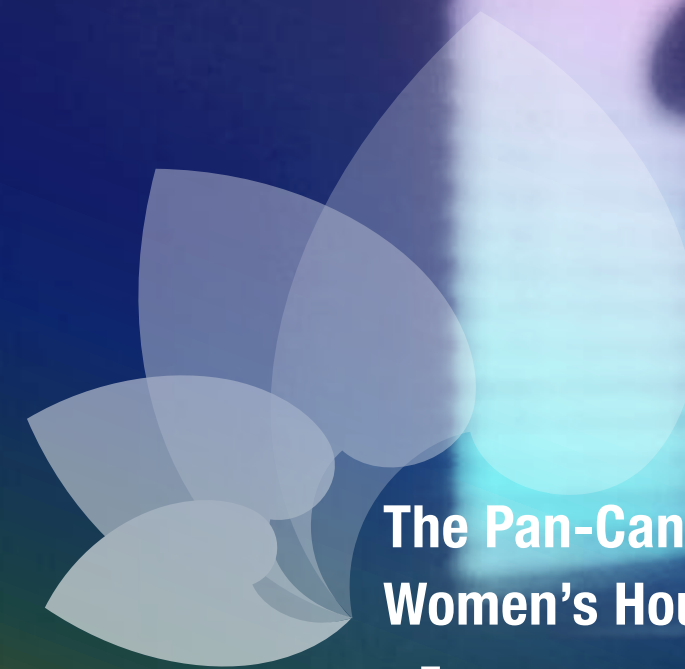


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The Pan-Canadian Voice on Women's Housing

8th Annual Symposium Report

HOSTED FEBRUARY 20 – 21, 2025, IN TORONTO, ON
Prepared by Khulud Baig



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Land Acknowledgement

This year's annual Pan-Canadian Voice on Women's Housing (PCVWH) Symposium was hosted in Tkaronto (Toronto, ON), the traditional and unceded territory of many First Nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, the Anishinaabeg, the Chippewa, the Hodinöhsö:ni', and the Huron-Wendat. Tkaronto is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples.

We also acknowledge that Tkaronto is located within the lands protected by the Dish With One Spoon wampum agreement, and is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.

The hosts and attendees of the symposium also acknowledge and recognize that Canada is a settler colonial state on Turtle Island, which for generations has been governed and inhabited by Indigenous Peoples practicing traditional ways of doing, knowing, and being. This Claim acknowledges that the current homelessness crisis, disproportionately impacting Indigenous Peoples, is a direct result of colonial and patriarchal policies that have dispossessed Indigenous Peoples of their lands and homes, and commodified land and housing as profitable assets leading to the concentration of wealth with a privileged few.

Introduction

The Two-Day Pan-Canadian Voice on Women's Housing Symposium (PCVWH) on Gender and Housing Justice convened 80 women and gender-diverse individuals from across Canada in Toronto. Participants engaged in workshops, thematic discussions, and information sessions focused on housing and homelessness issues affecting women and gender-diverse people. A key highlight was the participation of the Neha National Human Rights Review Panel on Gender and Housing, whose panelists engaged with attendees in a thematic dialogue to inform their ongoing review process.

This report details summaries the key takeaways from the two-day symposium, highlighting key issues discussed and presenting recommendation to be carried forward.





DAY ONE PROCEEDINGS

Welcome Address – Donna-Lynn Rosa, CEO, Atira

The February 2025 PCVWH Symposium opened with welcome remarks from Atira Women's Resource Society's CEO, Donna-Lynn Rosa. Donna-Lynn Rosa welcomed attendees by acknowledging the leadership of the women who came before her at Atira, recognizing their foundational work in addressing housing insecurity. She reaffirmed that housing is a fundamental human right, emphasizing its role in ensuring safety, dignity, and stability. She urged attendees to recognize that their voices and shared experiences at the symposium would inform policy, funding models, and future housing solutions. Rosa encouraged bold, imaginative thinking, reminding participants that change is driven by advocacy and collective action.



Opening Ceremony

On Day 1 of the PCVWH Symposium, Elder Marie McGregor Pitawanakwat offered opening prayers in Anishinaabemowin and English. Elder Marie's prayer focused on offering strength as we worked together during the day. Knowledge Keepers Pamela Spurvey and Tracey McKinnon sang, drummed and offered teachings around the Women's Warrior Song, and smudged for all participants.

Keynote Presentations and Discussions

Housing Solutions for Women and Gender-Diverse People

Dr. Carolyn Whitzman

The first session at the symposium was led by Dr. Carolyn Whitzman. Dr. Carolyn Whitzman is a housing and social policy researcher. She has worked as an expert advisor to UBC's Housing Assessment Resource Tools (HART) project, which developed standardized best practices for analysing housing need, using government land for nonmarket housing, and nonmarket property acquisition, using detailed, open data. These tools have influenced federal housing policy. Currently, she works as a senior housing researcher at University of Toronto's School of Cities, analysing best practices to scale affordable 'missing middle', modular, and replicable housing. She is on the federal government's Expert Panel on the Homebuilding Industry.

At the symposium Dr. Whitzman provided an overview of Canada's housing crisis, noting the severe lack of purpose-built, affordable housing for lower-income households. She stressed that homelessness is not an inevitability but rather a result of policy decisions, and she called for increased collaboration between municipal, provincial, and federal governments to address these gaps effectively.

Discussion Highlights:

- One participant highlighted the challenges posed by national occupancy standards, which prevent multiple people from living together, even when sharing housing would provide stability and support.
- Dr. Whitzman responded by criticizing how national occupancy standards are often misapplied to deny housing. She pointed out that some individuals and families can only afford one-bedroom apartments and questioned why affordability should determine whether they can be housed at all.
- A participant from the Northwest Territories shared their experience of living in transitional housing, recounting



how their rent was suddenly increased by \$650 per month. After contesting the increase, the housing provider admitted it was an error and adjusted it to \$200. However, the participant expressed frustration over the lack of accountability, as there were no improvements to the building or income increases to justify even the adjusted rent hike.

- Another Indigenous participant described the stark realities of housing insecurity, recounting how she and her son were forced to live on a mattress in her daughter's basement. Despite accessing housing and support services across Canada, she remained unable to secure stable housing. "The government sees my community as expendable," she stated.
- Several participants highlighted the dire conditions of homelessness, including preventable cases of frostbite that resulted in amputations. They criticized the healthcare system's reactive approach, stating that more should be done to prevent these tragedies rather than simply treating the aftermath.
- Dr. Whitzman reiterated that reliance on shelters and emergency housing is an inadequate long-term solution. Instead, she advocated for permanent, supportive housing and a shift towards Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) models, ensuring that rent increases are linked to income rather than arbitrary market rates.
- Dr. Whitzman also noted that "Market rate differs by province- it does not reflect anything about the renter [or their income]. Just because the market is more expensive, it doesn't mean people's income is higher. Market rate should be changed to RGI, and increases should be related to increases in income"



Current Political Climate and Housing Advocacy

Senator Marilou McPhedran

The second session the day one of the symposium was from Senator Marilou McPhedran. The Honourable Marilou McPhedran is a human rights lawyer/educator/activist and Order of Canada Member, appointed an independent senator, on the recommendation of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in November 2016.

Recognized for co-leadership in developing constitutional equality rights, she sponsors Bill S-201 to lower the federal voting age to 16, as well as Bill S-261, the "Can't Buy Silence Act" to stop misuse of Non Disclosure Agreements (NDAs) by entities receiving federal funding.

A tenured full professor at the University of Winnipeg Global College when she joined the Senate, her office is run as a parliamentary learning lab because the top priority on her Senate agenda is engaging diverse young leaders and civil society in Canadian parliamentary and global affairs.

Senator McPhedran addressed the broader political climate and its implications for marginalized communities. She highlighted how systemic inequalities disproportionately impact women, children, and gender-diverse individuals, particularly during periods of political instability.

Key Takeaways:

- Senator McPhedran shared that younger generations are experiencing increased anxiety over issues such as war and conflict, which exacerbate economic and social precarity.
- She invoked Elder Claudette Commanda's teachings, urging participants to stay connected to their communities and core values as they navigate these challenges.
- She described systemic poverty as a mechanism that benefits the upper class, noting that government funding meant to reduce poverty often circulates within bureaucratic systems, benefiting those administering the programs rather than the people who need them most.
- Recalling her experience as a federal consultant on women's rights in Thailand, she described the stark contrast between Canada's public commitments to gender equity and the entrenched patriarchy she encountered within federal institutions. "I have never faced such deeply entrenched levels of patriarchy in federal institutions," she remarked.

- The Senator emphasized the need for strategic advocacy, particularly in the lead-up to elections. She encouraged participants to engage with their local representatives, build relationships within and beyond their communities, and develop constituency-based advocacy strategies, including social media engagement.

Discussion Highlights:

- A participant asked how individuals can maintain their values-based advocacy when struggling for survival. Another responded by emphasizing the importance of support networks, community-building, and coalition-based organizing.
- The Senator acknowledged that survival can sometimes force people into ethical compromises, but she stressed that advocates must remain grounded in reality while striving for systemic change.
- A participant inquired about how to hold privileged women accountable for their role in upholding oppressive systems without alienating potential allies. Senator McPhedran responded that full allyship is often unrealistic, and advocates must set practical expectations while still pushing for meaningful engagement.
- Attendees noted the continued reduction in social services, referencing a Calgary-based disability advocacy organization that recently lost \$500,000 in funding.
- One participant shared a deeply personal and heartbreaking story: she met her wife while living in a shelter, and they now share housing with a formerly homeless sister-in-law. The participant, who lives with a severe spinal cord condition, was denied surgery and has since applied for Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID), citing chronic pain and the exhaustion of navigating Canada’s complex healthcare system.
- The Senator encouraged attendees to continue their advocacy, to have their voices be heard, and to question their elected representatives. She emphasized that “Change takes time, persistence, and work.”

Update to the PCVWH Calls to Action

Khulud Baig

The PCVWH Symposium has always been guided by calls to actions collectively drafted by symposium participants. Every year, an update to these Calls to Action is provided to inform discussions and advocacy at the symposium. This year’s updates are as follows:

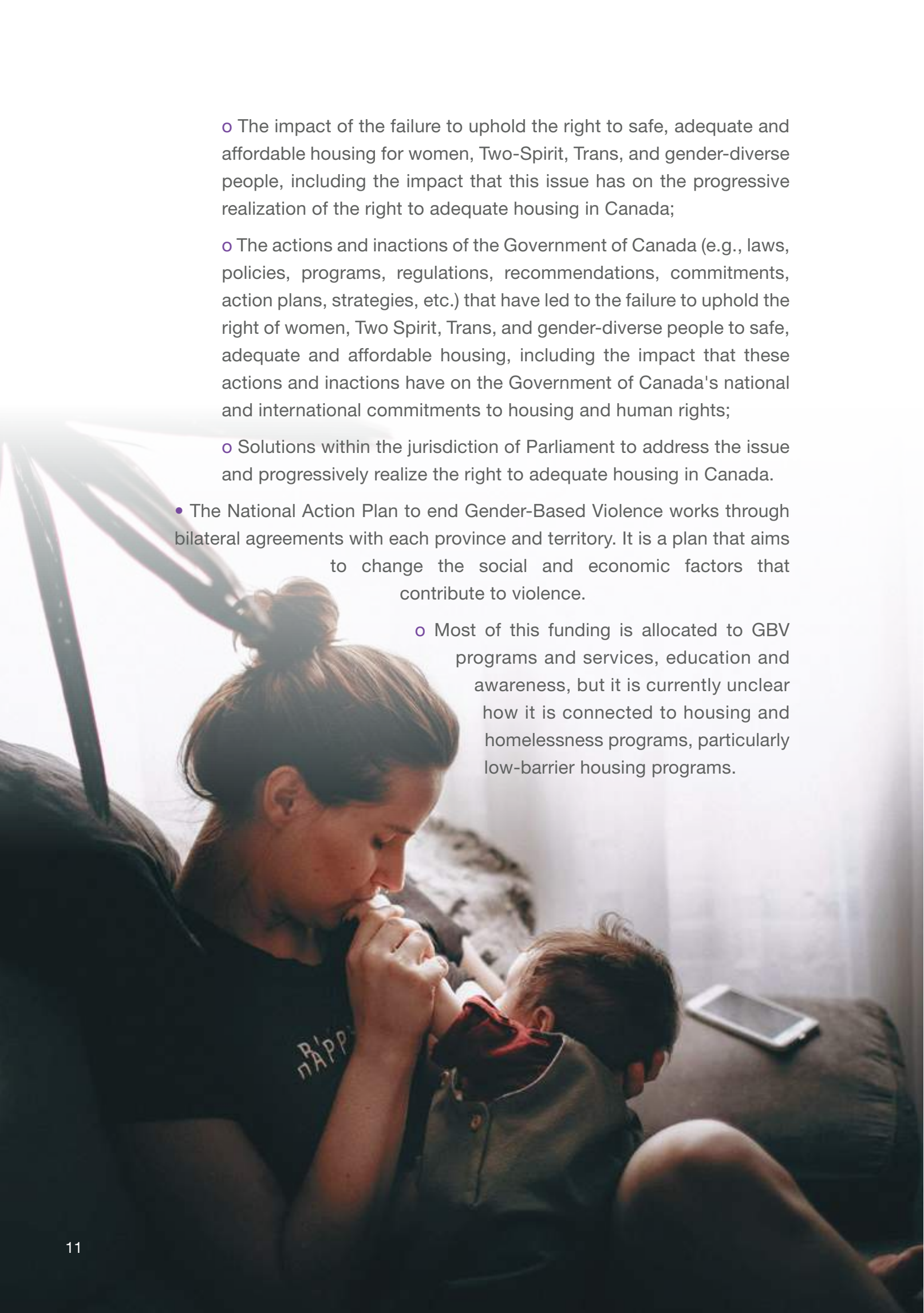


Call to Action #1: Housing and Women with Lived Expertise: The National Housing Strategy (NHS) should be developed in consultation with experts with lived experience of homelessness and housing need. The CMHC should link the NHS to the Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Strategy to End Violence Against Women. The CMHC should be accountable for its progress to stakeholders in women’s housing.

Key Updates:

- **Canada Housing Plan** announced in Budget 2024 bears promise and prospect for women and gender-diverse people experiencing housing insecurity, with a strong caveat that the implementation includes sharp gender-based and human-rights focused implementation, monitoring, and tracking mechanisms¹. Some key highlights include:
 - \$1 Billion investment in the Affordable Housing Fund
 - The launch of a new \$1.5 Billion Rental Protection Fund
 - Apartment Construction Loan Program
 - Canadian Renters’ Bill of Rights
 - Investments to Address Encampments and Unsheltered Homelessness
- **Neha Review Panel:** There is a national human rights review panel currently underway focused on gender and housing justice. The Neha Review Panel will examine the right to housing for women, Two Spirit, trans, and gender-diverse people, and the government’s duty to uphold this right. Neha will focus on:

¹ Baig and Seccia (2024). WNHN welcomes ambitious Budget 2024, calls for urgency to meet gender-based targets. Women’s National Housing and Homelessness Network. <https://womenshomelessness.ca/budget2024/>



- The impact of the failure to uphold the right to safe, adequate and affordable housing for women, Two-Spirit, Trans, and gender-diverse people, including the impact that this issue has on the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing in Canada;
- The actions and inactions of the Government of Canada (e.g., laws, policies, programs, regulations, recommendations, commitments, action plans, strategies, etc.) that have led to the failure to uphold the right of women, Two Spirit, Trans, and gender-diverse people to safe, adequate and affordable housing, including the impact that these actions and inactions have on the Government of Canada's national and international commitments to housing and human rights;
- Solutions within the jurisdiction of Parliament to address the issue and progressively realize the right to adequate housing in Canada.
- The National Action Plan to end Gender-Based Violence works through bilateral agreements with each province and territory. It is a plan that aims to change the social and economic factors that contribute to violence.
 - Most of this funding is allocated to GBV programs and services, education and awareness, but it is currently unclear how it is connected to housing and homelessness programs, particularly low-barrier housing programs.

Call to Action #2: First Nations, Métis and Inuit Housing: The federal government should ensure that all Indigenous women's housing, in urban centres and off reserve as well as on reserve, is inclusive of healing and treatment centres and administered by First Nations, Métis and Inuit women. The government of Canada should take immediate steps to reverse the policy that excludes Inuit from accessing federal shelter funding.

Key Updates:

- Budget 2023 plans to inject \$4 billion over seven years into an urban, rural and northern Indigenous housing strategy beginning in 2024-25, but that remains details under development.
 - As the \$4.3B funding launches in 2024 for the Urban, Rural and Northern Strategy, Budget 2024 represents a missed opportunity to commit additional funding to the URN Strategy to match calls from Indigenous communities and the housing sector across Canada.
 - In the budget analysis presented by the Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network (WNHHN), there were calls to specifically advocate for an intersectional gendered lens to be applied, and that these funds are equitably allocated to housing led by Indigenous women and gender-diverse people, for Indigenous women and gender-diverse people.²

Call to Action #3: Infrastructure Funding for Housing: The CMHC should ensure that funding for women's housing is equal to 25% (later 33%) of total NHS funding envelope. It should reinstate the Shelter Enhancement Program immediately, allowing for shelter and other kinds of housing.

Key Updates

- Over the past couple of years, lived experts and advocates have voiced the need for a renewal of the Rapid Housing Initiative, which proved to be critical funding for housing development during the pandemic. The renewal of the Rapid Housing Stream under the Affordable Housing Fund in Budget 2024 brings much needed attention and investment to address gaps that deeply impacts women and gender-diverse people experiencing housing insecurity.
 - In the Budget 2024 brief, WNHHN advocated for 40% of the stream be allocated to projects led by and serving women and gender-diverse people primarily.³

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

- Experts say lack of monitoring of programs like Rapid Housing Initiative is an outrageous oversight by the federal government. Lack of monitoring and tracking mechanisms, particularly around gender-specificity is a challenge. There are no clear targets around addressing core-housing need for women-led households – even when we know they are over-represented in poverty.
- We are lacking a single definition of affordable housing in all programs; this impacts the addition of low to moderate income homes to the housing stock – stock that is very critical to address housing need among the most vulnerable.

Call to Action #4: Operational Funding for Women’s and Women-Serving Organizations: The CHMC should advocate for funding for women’s and women-serving organizations to be comparable to the level of funding for services and programs provided directly by government and broader public sector agencies. Community-based front-line workers and organizational and program staff should be competitively compensated.

Key Updates:

- Funding under Social Housing Agreements (and federal-provincial operating agreements with Quebec and PEI) and NHS bilateral agreements with provinces and territories allows for affordability support and ongoing operations funding.⁴
- The federal government can and should make cost-sharing agreements conditional upon recipient governments and organizations adopting a rights-based, GBA+ approach. This includes agreements that require operational funding for social and supportive housing, as has been the case for the Rapid Housing Initiative. It could prioritize new and renovated social housing for Canada Housing Benefits, in order to bring costs down to affordable levels. This is particularly important for larger households requiring 3+ bedroom homes.⁵

Call to Action #5: Women and a Guaranteed Annual Income: the CMHC should advocate for a Guaranteed Annual Income program that is reflective of regional realities. The program should be built using an intersectional gender lens with the participation of a diverse cross-section of women. It should be responsive to women’s self-identified needs such as ensuring family preservation, sustainable, rent-geared-to-income housing, strong transitional supports, and be in addition to child benefits.

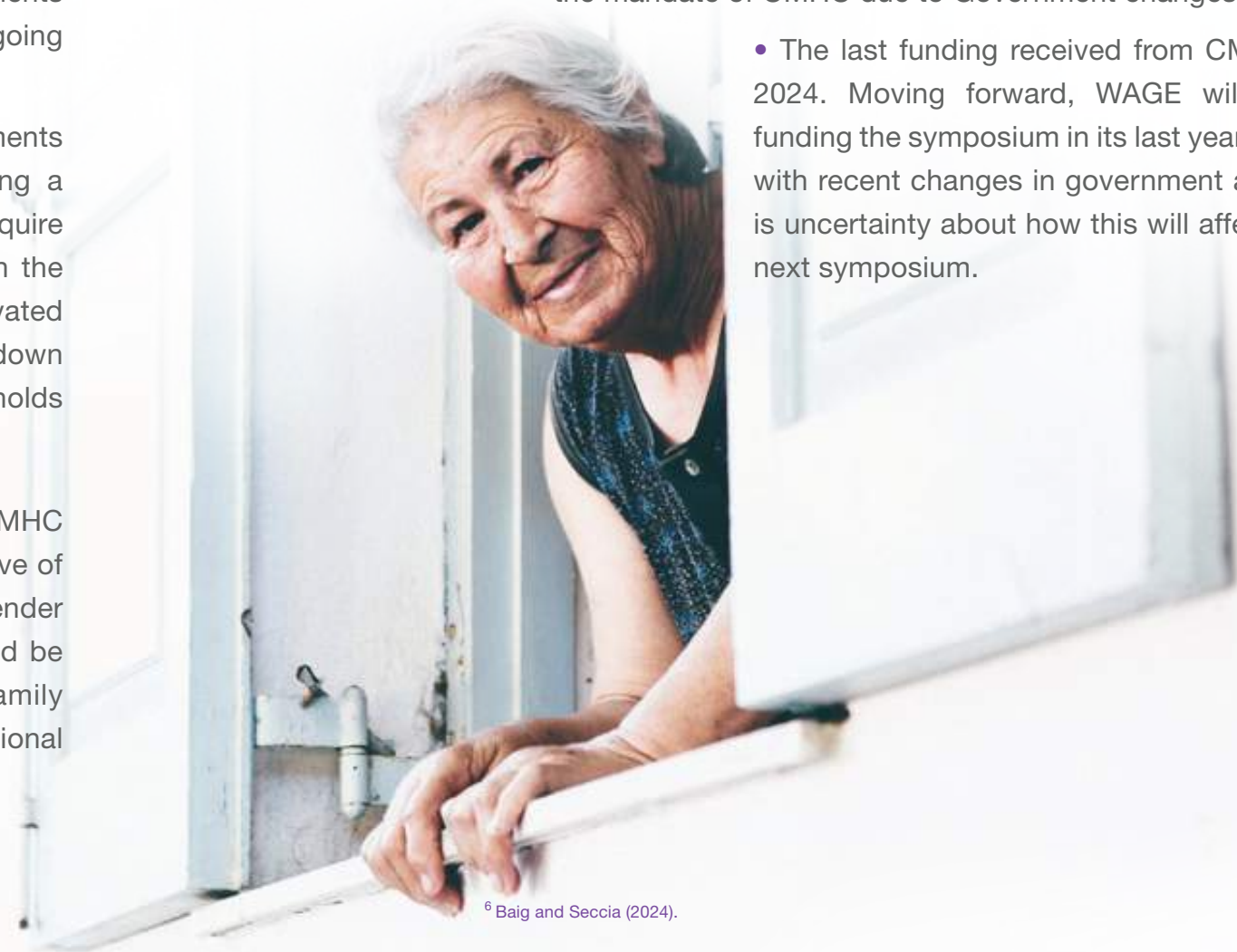
Key Updates:

- Social Assistance rates are significantly below the poverty line and have not increased with cost of living.
- **Canada Disability Benefit:** The announcement of the Canada Disability Benefit comes after years of advocacy from the disability community. Advocates are disappointed that calls for a \$1000/month benefit were met with a \$200/month benefit announcement. [WNHHN’s research shows](#) that over 75% of women and gender-diverse people experiencing housing insecurity report some form of disability. There is fear that a benefit this small would not be able to lift women and gender-diverse people experiencing disability out of housing insecurity or homelessness.⁶

Call to Action #6: A Voice for Women’s Housing: There should be ongoing funding to the Pan-Canadian Voice for Women’s Housing.

Key Updates:

- Recent developments and changes in CMHC mandate to no longer support policy and advocacy program and move that under Infrastructure Canada have led to lower-than-expected funding for Symposium. As PCVWH Symposium is a policy change initiative, it no longer falls under the mandate of CMHC due to Government changes.
- The last funding received from CMHC was for the year 2024. Moving forward, WAGE will be responsible for funding the symposium in its last year for FY2-26. However, with recent changes in government affecting WAGE, there is uncertainty about how this will affect the funding for the next symposium.





Housing Insecurity and Intimate Partner Violence During COVID-19

Lisa Martin & Daniely Sciarotta

Following the presentation on the updates on the Calls to Action, Lisa Martin and Daniely Sciarotta presented findings from a community-centered research project examining the housing challenges faced by women survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lisa Martin is a feminist housing activist based in Toronto with a lived experience of gender-based violence. She conceptualizes her work as being at the intersection of social engaged art, research and activism. Lisa's work focuses on systems thinking, arts-based knowledge mobilization, dissemination and power literacy. Daniely Sciarotta is Postdoctoral scholar at the Department of Psychology at the University of Guelph. Her research explores the connections between homelessness, housing instability, and violence against women, focusing on how these influence women's health and wellbeing—particularly young women—through a sociocultural lens.

The research presented by Lisa Martin and Daniely Sciarotta discussed how the pandemic intensified financial instability and increased the complexity and severity of violence, leaving many women unable to plan for or seek support.

Key Findings:

- Shelter availability was severely limited, with long waitlists making it difficult for survivors to secure safe accommodation.
- Many survivors struggled to afford independent housing due to financial instability exacerbated by the pandemic.
- The social service and housing systems often replicated the power dynamics of abuse, forcing survivors to repeatedly recount traumatic experiences to access support.
- Victim-blaming and systemic delays frequently forced survivors to remain in unsafe situations until their circumstances were deemed "severe enough" to warrant action.
- The research underscored the urgent need for preventative housing supports, rather than relying solely on reactive interventions once survivors were already in crisis.

Lived Experience Panel – Moderated by PCVWH Advisory Committee Member, Lori Deets.

The Lived Experience Panel on the day one of the PCVWH Symposium provided invaluable insights into the realities of homelessness, supportive housing, and systemic barriers faced by marginalized communities in Canada. Facilitated by Lori Deets, the panelists shared personal experiences, highlighting the importance of lived experience in policymaking, the need for comprehensive support systems, and the role of housing in achieving stability and dignity.

Panelist Testimonies: Experiences in Supportive Housing and the Support System Network

KU – Newcomer Experience and Policy Advocacy

KU and her family immigrated to Toronto from Rwanda in 2020, facing significant challenges in a crowded shelter. After seven months, they moved into social housing connected to a community centre, where she accessed essential resources, including therapy and social work services. These supports helped her bridge language barriers, create social networks, and find job opportunities. KU, now working in policy and advocacy, emphasized the necessity of lived experience in decision-making:

- “Lived experience needs to be involved in policymaking—we’ve been through it, and our voices should be heard.”
- “Having a roof over your head is not enough; people need tangible resources and support to navigate the system.”
- “We need lived experience in research, government, and policy—those affected by these decisions must have a seat at the table.”

TM – The Impact of Low-Barrier Housing

TM found stability through supportive housing and now works as a peer support worker in the same building where she lives. She stressed the need for low-barrier housing that does not penalize individuals for struggling with sobriety, identification requirements, or visitors.

- “A lot of people think you need a shelter, but you need access to resources to get back on your feet.”
- “Homelessness is isolating. Being treated like a person, not a problem, made me want to help myself and others.”
- “Stability, dignity, and a real chance to rebuild—that’s what gets people off the streets for good.”

CR – 2Spirit and LGBTQ+ Housing Challenges

CR, raised in a small reserve by strong matriarchs, pursued higher education but faced violence as a Two-Spirit individual. Repeatedly displaced due to violence and discrimination, CR now works at an advisory level advocating for inclusive housing policies:

- “We need safe spaces for LGBTQ+ people—we are hunted and suffering.”
- “I grew up with inclusive family values where all genders are sacred. We need policies that reflect that.”

CS – Indigenous Identity and Housing Struggles

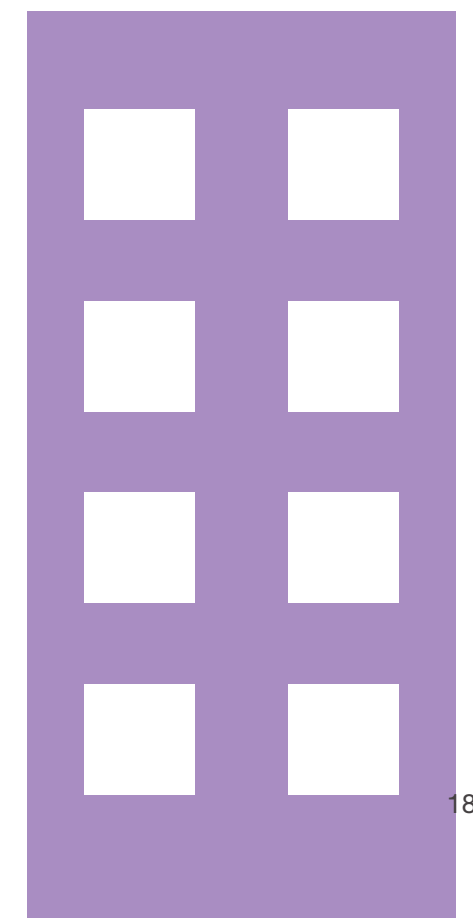
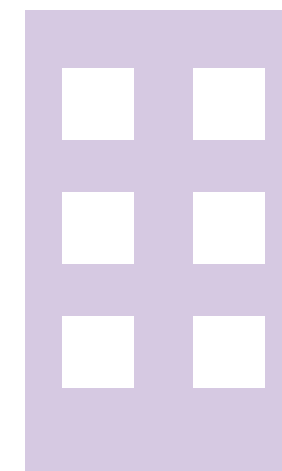
A Plains Cree woman and a Sixties Scoop survivor, CS has navigated multiple housing support systems across Canada. Despite her efforts, she remains without permanent housing.

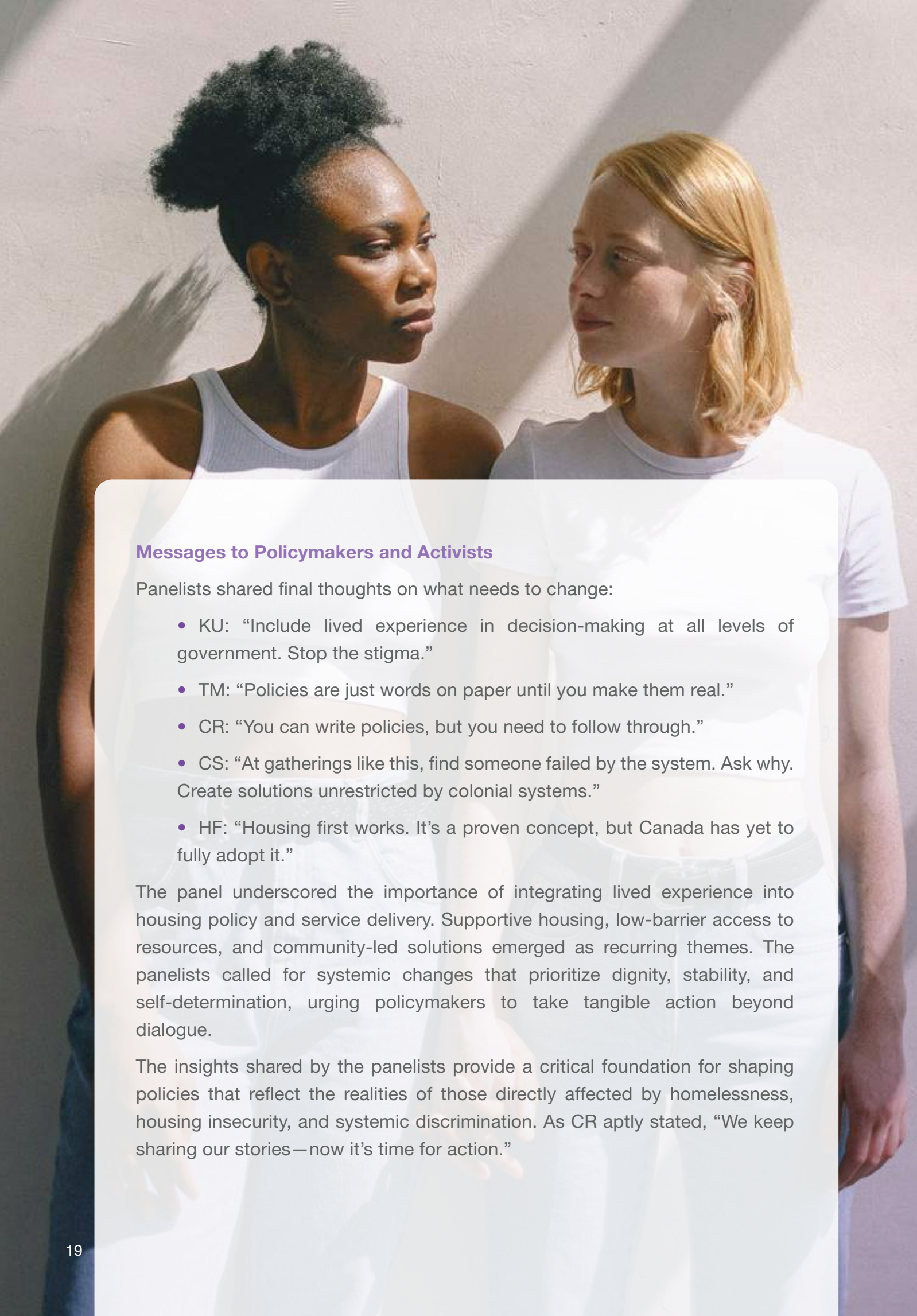
- “No child after me will ever be lost again. My love is for my children and my people.”
- “True success is what people feel in your presence—not wealth or material things.”
- “I live in a basement suite with my son—I am thankful for a place to sleep, but I have no privacy and no room.”

HF – Housing from a Disability Lens

HF has struggled to secure permanent, accessible, and affordable housing, having lived in 37 places in 35 years. While currently housed in a townhouse with affordable rent, it is slated for demolition in five years, forcing another displacement.

- “I’ve had a taste of stability, of having a green space, and I don’t want to return to an apartment.”
- “Housing first works. It’s proven in many European countries—I don’t know why we haven’t done it here.”





Messages to Policymakers and Activists

Panelists shared final thoughts on what needs to change:

- KU: “Include lived experience in decision-making at all levels of government. Stop the stigma.”
- TM: “Policies are just words on paper until you make them real.”
- CR: “You can write policies, but you need to follow through.”
- CS: “At gatherings like this, find someone failed by the system. Ask why. Create solutions unrestricted by colonial systems.”
- HF: “Housing first works. It’s a proven concept, but Canada has yet to fully adopt it.”

The panel underscored the importance of integrating lived experience into housing policy and service delivery. Supportive housing, low-barrier access to resources, and community-led solutions emerged as recurring themes. The panelists called for systemic changes that prioritize dignity, stability, and self-determination, urging policymakers to take tangible action beyond dialogue.

The insights shared by the panelists provide a critical foundation for shaping policies that reflect the realities of those directly affected by homelessness, housing insecurity, and systemic discrimination. As CR aptly stated, “We keep sharing our stories—now it’s time for action.”

Neha Review Panel Overview and Preparation for the Oral dialogue on Day 2 – Stefania Seccia and Khulud Baig, Women’s National Housing and Homelessness Network

To prepare attendees for the oral dialogue with review panelists from the Neha Human Rights Review Panel on gender and housing, the Women’s National Housing and Homelessness Network staff, Stefania Seccia and Khulud Baig hosted a preparatory session. The session’s objectives were to equip all participants with the knowledge and background to engage with the review panelists on Day 2 of the symposium. As part of the workshop, Seccia provided an introduction to the upcoming Neha Review Panel and its history and context, setting the stage for a deep and meaningful exchange on housing justice. Neha review panelist Pamela Glode Desrochers stressed the importance of storytelling, encouraging attendees to share their experiences authentically, without fear of judgment or perception.

Neha review panelist Sylvia Maracle offered profound reflections on the significance of Neha, emphasizing the word’s Indigenous roots and traditions and the need for systemic change in housing policies:

- **Neha as a Concept:** Neha is a Kanien'kéha-Mohawk word meaning "our ways". It describes a way of life that is open, peaceful, supportive and healing. Seen as an ever-expanding circle, Neha will be a space where people can share their experiences and work together towards solutions.⁷

o “In colloquial, Neha means our stuff. It actually means natural people’s ways- the way we were taught. Why we are matrilineal. Why our clans come from our mother, and not our father. The patriarch was not necessary. The clan mother leaders of our nation determined if our Neha was in danger- and they went first... we went, and we were surprised when Europeans came and asked them, “where are your women? You should not be out here making decisions by yourselves... We want to stop the male-centric notion that housing belongs somehow to them.” – Sylvia Maracle

- **Rejecting Systemic Replication:** Maracle highlighted that existing systems often perpetuate the same failures, and that true change requires a break from past models.
- **Redefining Shelter and Housing:** She challenged prevailing definitions of housing and shelter, criticizing transitional housing models that impose restrictive timelines and fail to provide true security.
- **Empowering Women and 2-Spirit Leaders:** Maracle called for a collective approach that harnesses the power of women and 2-Spirit individuals, reinforcing that change must come from those directly affected.

Key Themes and Insights from Participants

Facilitators invited participants to contribute their visions for safe, affordable housing. The goal was to utilize participant input to generate themes for Day 2 Oral Dialogue with Neha Human Rights Review panelists. Participants provided diverse input around key challenges and issues impacting them and their communities:

1. The Long-Term Impact of Homelessness

- Participants shared deeply personal accounts of how housing instability has lasting psychological, emotional, and financial consequences.
- One attendee highlighted the trauma of being unhoused: “I have an eating disorder because I was unhoused. I have anxiety because I was unhoused. I can’t invest my money because I’m too afraid to lose access to it.”
- The discussion emphasized the need for housing policies that acknowledge and address long-term trauma rather than merely offering temporary solutions.

2. Sustainability in Housing Solutions

- There was a strong call for sustainable housing that includes gardens and other self-sufficiency measures.
- Participants questioned whether current housing models promote true independence or merely offer short-term relief.

3. Barriers to Accessing Housing

- Many housing programs require individuals to meet rigid criteria, such as completing detox programs before accessing safe housing.
- Attendees challenged these policies, arguing that they ignore the realities of trauma and domestic violence survivors.

4. Disparities in Housing Support Based on Needs

- Concerns were raised about funding imbalances: “In Nova Scotia, there is so much money for people with lower needs, but we can’t support those who will have higher needs in 10-15 years.”
- The discussion underscored the necessity of proactive, rather than reactive, housing strategies.

5. Indigenous-Led Housing Solutions

- Participants emphasized the need for Indigenous-designed and operated housing both on and off reserves.
- Challenges faced by Indigenous communities in rural areas were highlighted, including the lack of infrastructure and support systems for those living in makeshift or unsafe conditions.

6. Addressing Rural Housing Needs

- A recurring concern was the lack of support for rural homelessness: “Homeless people are living in broken trailers, outdoors, with no infrastructure, water, or heat. Women and seniors in these communities don’t feel safe.”
- Attendees called for greater accountability and support for rural housing initiatives.

7. Inclusion of Indigenous Leadership in Policy Discussions

- A participant emphasized: “If you want to make change, you need to bring everybody to the table. More Indigenous governments need to be included in these conversations.”
- The discussion reinforced the importance of Indigenous self-determination in housing policies.

8. Ethical Data Collection and Research

- Participants challenged how data is collected and used in policymaking.
- One participant pointed out the exploitation of lived experiences: “You’ll give someone a \$5 Tim Horton’s card to tell their story, but they’ll still be unhoused for the next ten years.”
- The session called for a shift in research ethics, focusing on action rather than trauma-centered storytelling.

This workshop provided a powerful platform for Indigenous women, 2-Spirit individuals, and other under-represented voices to shape the housing conversation. It set the stage for the thematic oral dialogue on Day 2 of the PCVWH Symposium. Based on the input provided by participants in various areas, the Seccia and Baig extracted the following themes to guide the discussion on Day 2 of the PCVWH Symposium:

- 1) Land Back and Culturally Informed Solutions By and For the Community
- 2) Intergenerational Impacts of Housing and Developing Housing for Intergenerational Prosperity
- 3) Institutionalization and Criminalization
- 4) Person-centred approaches
- 5) Accountability for Service Providers and Those in Positions of Authority
- 6) Challenges Imposed by Jurisdictional divides and the Importance of Including Indigenous leadership and Governments
- 7) Sustainable housing and Holistic Housing Solutions for Future Generations
- 8) Lived experience engagement in Human Rights Processes and Accessibility

Closing Ceremony – Day 1

On Day 1 of the PCVWH Symposium, Elder Marie McGregor Pitawanakwat offered closing prayers in Anishinaabemowin and English. Elder Marie's prayer focused on participants taking care of themselves as a day of hard work comes to an end. Knowledge Keepers Pamela Spurvey and Tracey McKinnon sang, drummed smudged for all participants.





DAY TWO
PROCEEDINGS

Opening Ceremony

On Day 2 of the PCVWH Symposium, Elder Marie McGregor Pitawanakwat offered opening prayers in Anishinaabemowin and English. Elder Marie's prayer focused on offering strength as we worked together during the day. Knowledge Keepers Pamela Spurvey and Tracey McKinnon sang, drummed and offered teachings around the Women's Warrior Song, and smudged for all participants.

Oral Dialogue with the Neha Human Rights Review Panelists

The Neha Human Rights Review Panel Oral Dialogue hosted at the PCVWH Symposium Day 2, provided a critical space for dialogue, centering the voices of those most affected by housing injustices. Rather than a formal hearing, the oral dialogue was structured as a conversation—one where individuals could share their lived experiences without constraint. The discussions emphasized self-determination, the dismantling of systemic barriers, and the power of storytelling in shaping change.

Opening Remarks from the Review Panelists

Sylvia Maracle and Pam Golde Desrochers

Sylvia Maracle: Reclaiming Our Power and Defining Our Own Priorities

Review Panelist Sylvia Maracle set the tone for the discussion by highlighting the importance of self-determination and breaking free from imposed systems:

- **Recognizing Our Expertise:**

“Many of you were never given a chance to determine what your priorities are and how they can be delivered to you. This is a report of our own stories—we are the experts in our own lives.”

- This statement underscored the need for community-driven solutions rather than top-down policies that fail to reflect lived realities.

- **Shifting from Hearings to Conversations:**

“We wanted to make sure that the panel review was not a series of hearings, but instead a series of conversations.”

- The panel rejected the traditional model of bureaucratic review, emphasizing relationship-building and meaningful dialogue as the foundation for change.

- **Breaking Free from Systemic Constraints:**

“We get trained by the system to fit in a box. We write proposals based on what they want. We need to smash the box. We don't have to accept the system the way it is.”

- Maracle called for a fundamental shift in how funding, policy, and advocacy work are approached—urging communities to reject restrictive frameworks and instead define their own priorities.

- **Honouring the Role of 2-Spirit, Trans, and Gender-Diverse (2STGD) People:**

“2STGD people in our community have never had a chance to be who they are. We need to find the ways that the system has to change.”

- The panel reinforced the necessity of creating inclusive, affirming housing solutions that recognize the unique barriers faced by 2STGD individuals.

- **Integrating Mind and Heart in the Movement for Change:**

“Be free, express what you need to. It's not up to you to make sure people can understand. I want us to not just think about something, I want us to have emotion about it. It should be a coming together of your mind and your heart.”

- Maracle encouraged participants to engage with both intellect and emotion, reinforcing that true transformation requires a deep, personal connection to the issues at hand.

- **Leaving a Legacy for Future Generations:**

“All we're asking you to do is be grateful for this opportunity, grateful for whatever notions will come to you, and you will set the moccasin tracks for the next generation that you're raising. And there will be a time where there is peace among us.”

- This reflection emphasized the long-term impact of the conversations taking place, positioning the work of today as foundational for future generations.

Pamela Glode Desrochers: Elevating Overlooked Voices and Embracing Storytelling

Pamela Glode Desrochers emphasized the importance of amplifying voices that have historically been silenced:

- **A Platform for Those Overlooked:**

“This is about giving a voice to our community members who are always overlooked and always discounted.”

- The panel was a space where individuals who have been excluded from decision-making processes could finally be heard.

- **Owning and Protecting Personal Narratives:**

“It is about your voice—each and every one of you has your story. I don’t want you to have to relive your trauma.”

- The discussion acknowledged the harm often caused by repeatedly recounting traumatic experiences and affirmed that participants could share on their own terms.

- **Challenging a History of Being Silenced:**

“We’ve all been told no time and time again. I want you to have the opportunity to raise your voice.”

- Desrochers encouraged participants to push past historical dismissals and assert their right to be heard.

- **Empowering Authentic Storytelling:**

“Don’t worry about the impacts because this is your story, and you have the right to tell it the way you want to tell it.”

- This statement reinforced autonomy over personal narratives, ensuring that stories are not shaped by external expectations or systems of power.



Thematic Discussions

Based on the themes determined during the workshop on the oral dialogue on Day 1, attendees were invited to group around the theme that they would like to contribute to during the oral dialogue. Attendees got an opportunity to work in thematic small groups to develop report backs to the review panel using the following questions as a guide.

Once small group discussions reached a report back, all thematic areas were invited to share their discussions in a big sharing circle with the review panelists. Participants shared lived experiences, concerns, and solutions that emphasized community-driven, culturally informed approaches to housing.

Topic 1: Land Back – Culturally-Informed Solutions by and for Community

Reclaiming Land as a Path to Housing Justice

Indigenous participants at the symposium emphasized that the ongoing struggle for land rights is central to addressing housing insecurity:

- **“Why are we fighting for stolen land that has been taken from us?”**
 - The dispossession of Indigenous lands was identified as a root cause of housing inequities.
- **“Our land has been taken away. Our land is our wealth. Without land, there is no wealth. It keeps people in poverty.”**
 - Without access to land, communities remain economically marginalized and unable to build sustainable futures.
- **“Community solutions and culturally appropriate ways are the way forward. The people in power don’t want communities to have power. [Colonial] Law preserves culture and preserves generational wealth. It displaces poor people with gentrification.”**
 - Colonial legal and policy frameworks have historically prioritized wealth accumulation for the privileged while displacing vulnerable communities.

Land Trusts as a Solution

The discussion highlighted the importance of community-controlled land trusts to prevent displacement and ensure culturally appropriate housing:

- **“Nothing can be put in the community without consulting the community.”**
 - Participants called for mechanisms that ensure meaningful consultation and self-governance in land use.



- **“This needs to be brought across Canada. Our rules and regulations need to be heard. None of us want to struggle. We may be from different cultures, but we all want to be safe and have a place to live.”**

- The need for national recognition of community-led land governance was underscored as an urgent policy priority.

Topic 2: Intergenerational Impacts of Housing and Developing Housing for Intergenerational Prosperity

The Need for Culturally Safe and Responsive Housing

Participants stressed the importance of designing housing that supports intergenerational well-being and cultural practices:

- **“Staff need sensitivity training—some of us are warriors, caretakers, feeders, we lead from the heart.”**
 - Housing support staff must be trained to recognize and respect the unique roles individuals play within their communities.
- **“We need alternative health, places for sacred medicines, where we can take care of our bodies, grounding work so we can process this horrific nonsense.”**
 - The importance of incorporating traditional healing spaces into housing developments was highlighted.
- **“Healing space and fire pit that is maintained. Some will want a 24-hr fire, some won’t think this is necessary.”**
 - Housing should allow for diverse cultural practices, including the presence of sacred spaces.

Rethinking Safety and Household Structures

Participants rejected one-size-fits-all definitions of family and safety:

- **“Safety is defined by the individual.”**
 - A universal approach to safety does not meet the needs of all communities.
- **“What a household looks like needs to be defined by the household.”**
 - Housing providers should recognize diverse family structures rather than impose rigid definitions.
- **“There’s lots of focus on houses—houses are not community-built. In trailer parks, there’s more community, more safety. People need people. When you put people in a house by themselves, this can cause problems.”**
 - The discussion pointed to the importance of community-oriented housing rather than isolating individual units.

Barriers to Housing and the Need for a Harm Reduction Approach

Participants shared personal experiences of barriers to accessing housing and emphasized the importance of low-barrier, trauma-informed services:

- **“There are so many barriers for people who have been told no so many times that they don’t qualify.”**
 - People with complex needs, including trauma survivors and single parents, are often left without support.
- **“I was told I needed to be clean before I had a safe space to escape my abuser. But I can’t get childcare to get clean when childcare costs \$900/month.”**
 - Housing policies must remove impossible conditions that keep people trapped in cycles of violence and poverty.
- **“There needs to be a harm reduction approach in meeting people’s needs. We need to be meeting them where they’re at in that moment, and ask ‘what is your priority right now?’”**
 - A **person-centered approach** should replace rigid eligibility criteria that fail to account for individual circumstances.



Rebuilding Community Through Supportive Housing Models

Participants proposed **alternative, community-driven models** to meet housing needs:

- **“True low-barrier services. Like compound-style living space with teachers, therapists, childcare, healing space, highlighting individual needs and skills in the community.”**
 - Housing should integrate wraparound supports for long-term stability.
- **“Moving back to the barter system—we got away from the ‘it takes a village’ mentality. That’s what supportive housing looks like—dignity, safety, security.”**
 - Revitalizing traditional community-based systems was proposed as a means of fostering mutual aid and self-sufficiency.
- **“Housing and services should be sensitive to culture and diversity.”**
 - Policy decisions must be informed by **lived experiences** and incorporate diverse cultural perspectives.

Topic 3: Institutionalization and Criminalization

The Criminalization of Homelessness and Poverty

The discussion examined how criminalization perpetuates systemic barriers to housing and well-being:

- **“Forced care is a violation of human rights, but how do we support in times of crisis?”**
 - The conversation grappled with the balance between autonomy and necessary support.
- **“There are so many expenses that go into the criminal justice system and institutions. Cost is a motivating factor when making change—this is an argument we need to use more of.”**
 - Participants suggested using economic arguments to push for investment in housing instead of incarceration.
- **“Once housing needs are addressed, there will be less pressure in the criminal system.”**
 - Addressing housing insecurity was identified as a key strategy for reducing criminalization.

Breaking the Cycle: Housing as a Justice Reform Strategy

Participants called for bold political action to shift resources away from punitive systems and toward housing:

- **“We need the political will to build housing, recognize problems with the criminal justice system, and make changes within it.”**
 - The discussion underscored the need for legislative and policy change to prioritize housing.
- **“No matter how much you criminalize someone, you will be putting barriers in their life that keep them from moving forward.”**
 - Criminal records create long-term obstacles to housing and employment.
- **“The bottom line is we have to build the housing that Canadians need.”**
 - The discussion concluded with a call for direct investment in housing solutions rather than carceral approaches.

Topic 4: People-Centred Approaches

The discussion focused on the need for housing solutions that prioritize individuals' lived realities, strengths, and cultural knowledge rather than rigid government mandates.

Challenging Traditional Service Models

Participants highlighted the harm caused by case plans that impose unrealistic goals:

- **“Meeting people where they’re at, without a case plan.”**
 - Many government programs set people up for failure by requiring them to secure housing with inadequate financial support (e.g., receiving only \$325/month).



Honoring Traditional Knowledge and Strengths

A recurring theme was the importance of reclaiming Indigenous and community-based ways of knowing:

- **“We fought for knowledge to be passed down and kept for generations.”**
 - Learning from Elders, storytelling, and ceremonies were seen as crucial to reconnecting with ancestral knowledge and resilience.
- **“Focus on what is strong vs. what is wrong.”**
 - Systems often approach people from a deficit perspective instead of recognizing their strengths.

Breaking Down Service Silos

Many participants spoke about the fragmentation of support services:

- **“We work in these siloed systems. You have to tell the same story over and over again.”**
 - This re-traumatization could be reduced by better coordination across service sectors.

Breaking Cycles of Poverty and Disconnection

Participants shared personal experiences of systemic barriers:

- **“I shouldn’t have had to choose between a job and raising my children.”**
 - A lack of family support structures can disrupt connections between parents and children.
- **“Financial literacy was not taught to my parents, so I never learned.”**
 - Some participants are working to break generational cycles by teaching their children financial skills to secure stable housing.



Topic 5: Accountability for Service Providers and Those in Positions of Authority

The discussion highlighted the need for stronger oversight of housing and support services to prevent harm and ensure equitable service delivery.

Ensuring Accountability Across the Sector

Participants stressed the need for standardized, enforceable mechanisms to hold service providers accountable:

- **“At what point are we doing more harm than good?”**
 - Without clear accountability, support services can sometimes become barriers themselves.

Strengthening Housing Protections

Current housing policies leave many vulnerable individuals without legal protection, particularly tenant protections:

- **“Tenancy laws in New Brunswick don’t cover co-ops or supportive housing.”**
 - This gap disproportionately affects those in the most precarious living situations.

Preventing Harm in the Nonprofit Sector

Concerns were raised about unethical practices in housing and support services:

- **“Some people enter this work to take advantage of vulnerable populations.”**
 - There is a need for stronger safeguards to ensure service providers operate ethically and respond to community concerns.

Creating Clear Complaint Mechanisms

- **“There should be an accessible way to report when services aren’t meeting people’s needs.”**
 - Establishing transparent and effective reporting structures was identified as a critical next step.

Topic 6: Challenges Imposed by Jurisdictional Divides and the Importance of Indigenous Leadership

The conversation focused on the intersection of housing justice, Indigenous sovereignty, and the impact of jurisdictional barriers.

Unregulated Settlement on Indigenous Lands

Some Indigenous communities are experiencing an influx of non-Indigenous homeless populations settling on their land:

- **“White people who are homeless are bringing broken trailers, tents, etc., to squat on reserve land in Vernon, BC.”**
 - This places additional strain on Indigenous communities that do not have the resources to provide adequate services.

Accountability for Housing Standards and Funding Use

Participants emphasized the need for higher construction and housing standards:

- **“13 people in a house with 1 bathroom—this is not a home.”**
 - Overcrowding is a widespread issue, exacerbated by poor-quality housing construction.
- **“We need to hold construction companies accountable to ensure funding is used for long-term, sustainable housing.”**
 - There were calls for higher building standards that align with the needs of Indigenous communities.

Housing as a Collective Resource

Participants discussed models that align with Indigenous governance structures:

- **“A house should follow the lifespan of a family.”**
 - Instead of forcing families to move frequently, homes should be passed down to new families when the original occupants no longer need them.

Recognizing Sacred Genders in Housing Policy

- **“Sacred genders should be taught in all communities.”**
 - Gender inclusivity should be a core component of housing initiatives.

Government and Institutional Accountability

- **“[Decision-makers and government] representatives need to be invited to these conversations.”**
 - Involving key decision-makers in these discussions could help drive systemic change.

Topic 7: Sustainable and Holistic Housing Solutions for Future Generations

The conversation explored the urgent need for environmentally sustainable, community-driven housing models.

Climate Change and Housing Resilience

Participants highlighted how climate change disproportionately affects those experiencing housing insecurity:

- **“Heat domes and extreme weather events impact people living outdoors.”**
 - Housing solutions must be adapted to withstand changing environmental conditions.

Community-Centered Sustainability

Participants emphasized the need for housing that is affordable, efficient, and locally sourced:

- **“Housing is not one-size-fits-all—different areas have different needs.”**

- “People who live in the housing need to have input on what sustainability looks like to them.”

- Suggestions included:

- Local access to food, water, and resources
- Flexible support systems that don’t cut people off
- Stronger social connections to prevent isolation
- Local sourcing of building materials

Addressing Systemic Barriers to Housing Access

- “There are so many empty homes that are underutilized.”

- The discussion acknowledged how market-driven housing policies limit access to available housing.

Topic 8: Lived Experience Engagement in Human Rights Processes and Accessibility

Participants emphasized the need for housing policies to be shaped by those directly affected by housing insecurity.

Expanding the Definition of Expertise

- “Can you describe a role that could not be filled by someone with lived experience?”

- The discussion challenged traditional hiring models that prioritize formal education over lived experience.

Addressing Barriers to Community Inclusion

- “It takes a team. If we give someone a chance, they will uplift others around them.”
- Providing opportunities for people with lived experience can help build stronger, more inclusive communities.

Recognizing Bias in Housing Policy and Consultation

- “A community meeting was held to decide if Inuit women fleeing violence could move into a neighborhood. If these women were wealthy, this would have been considered a hate crime.”

- Participants called attention to discriminatory practices that exclude marginalized groups from stable housing.

Sharing Circle on Solutions, Recommendations and Actions

Following thematic discussions and group report backs, the panelists, Maracle and Desrochers invited participants to join a conversation on solutions, promising practices, recommendations and actions. The sharing circle was an opportunity for participants to share their hopes and visions for the future and share ideas on what types of actions they’d like to see in their community for housing transformation. Participants spoke to many themes and examples, here is a summary of that discussion.

Community-Led Housing Models That Work

The discussion highlighted successful projects that prioritize community needs but face limitations due to underfunding.

Peer Support Workers as a Model for Breaking Isolation

Peer support programs are making a difference by fostering connections and helping individuals access essential resources:

- “We get people out of isolation, give them training, life skills, warm clothing, and connect them to resources.”

- Participants emphasized the transformative power of peer-led initiatives.

- “The only issue is we’re only funded for four hours a week.”

- Many programs lack sustainable funding, leaving people without support for much of the week. Peer support case loads are overwhelming, many times assigning one peer support worker to over a hundred clients.

Repurposing Unused Spaces for Housing

Participants shared examples of innovative housing solutions:

- **Northern Pines in North Bay:**
 - Converted an unused building into a three-stage housing program (shelter, transitional housing, and permanent units).
 - Includes 24-hour staffing, self-contained units, and a communal space.
 - Challenge: Demand exceeds capacity, with only 21 emergency beds available.
- **Suswin Village in North Bay:**
 - An Indigenous-led housing program connected to an Indigenous service hub and friendship centre.
 - Challenge: Lack of funding to replicate the model elsewhere.

Indigenous Sovereignty in Housing and Research

A central theme in the discussion was the need to embed Indigenous leadership and self-determination at every stage of housing projects and research initiatives.

Ensuring Indigenous Leadership from the Start

Participants emphasized the importance of involving Indigenous voices from the very beginning of any project:

- **“Don’t start the project without Indigenous people at the table. Too often, we’re brought in after decisions are already made.”**
 - Indigenous communities should lead, not just participate.
- **“We need to ask: How are Indigenous worldviews, values, and teachings reflected in this project?”**
 - Projects should reflect the needs and priorities of Indigenous peoples, not impose external solutions.

Reclaiming Sovereignty Over Data and Stories

Participants raised concerns about how research and funding initiatives extract Indigenous stories without meaningful benefit to the community:

- **“People come and take our stories, then give us a \$5 Tim’s card. I have a doughnut, I have a coffee, but I’m still sleeping outside.”**
 - There was a strong call for data sovereignty, ensuring Indigenous communities’ control and benefit from the information collected about them.

- **“How will you ask for consent at every stage of the project?”**
 - Consent has historically been taken away from Indigenous peoples, and projects must be designed to uphold ongoing, informed consent.

Government Action to Build a Better Future

Participants shared recommendations for systemic change, emphasizing the role of political engagement and advocacy.

Shifting Power Dynamics in Policymaking

- **“We need people with lived experience in government.”**
 - Housing policies should be shaped by those who have experienced housing insecurity firsthand.
- **“We need to shift funding priorities from the private sector to the needs of the community.”**
 - Government resources should support housing as a human right, not as an investment opportunity.

Strengthening Government Relationships with Communities

- **“Change comes from decision-makers—if they don’t understand what we need, they won’t give us opportunities.”**
 - More direct engagement between government officials and housing advocates is needed.
- **“We shouldn’t have to force relationships—we need genuine partnerships.”**
 - Governments must invest time in meaningful dialogue with community advocates instead of creating performative consultations.

Rethinking Land and Housing Availability

- **“Officials say, ‘We don’t have the land,’ but have they explored faith-based or school-owned land?”**
 - Participants called for creative solutions to land use, especially given underutilized properties.
- **“Many government employees are still working from home—are there empty government buildings that could be repurposed for housing?”**
 - Reimagining the use of public assets could help address the housing crisis.

Key Takeaways

The oral dialogue sharing circle created space for a robust conversation with participants that led to many critical takeaways. These takeaways create an opportunity for individuals to advocate for solutions further and engage in the Neha review panel to ensure their voices are heard. A few take aways from the sharing circle are,

- There are proven models for housing solutions, but they cannot be scaled up without sustainable, long-term funding and policy support.
- To uphold Indigenous sovereignty, housing and research initiatives must be co-developed with Indigenous communities from inception to completion.
- Policy changes, funding redistribution, and meaningful government engagement with communities are essential for long-term housing justice.

Closing Remarks from Neha Review Panelists, *Sylvia Maracle*

The closing remarks emphasized the importance of connection, healing, and community-building as fundamental components of housing justice.

Reconnecting to Ourselves and Each Other

- **“We need to help others reconnect to themselves so we can walk with each other.”**
 - Housing justice is not just about physical shelter—it is about restoring a sense of belonging and shared humanity.
 - Healing requires relatability and connection, both individually and as a collective.
- **“I had to learn how to find home within myself.”**
 - Personal healing plays a vital role in the ability to engage in meaningful relationships and build supportive communities.
 - The journey to secure stable housing must also include mental, emotional, and cultural well-being.

Building Community as a Pathway to Change

- **“Get involved with community centres—create and build community in your area.”**
 - Strong communities foster safety, support, and resilience.
 - Participants were encouraged to actively engage in local initiatives and create spaces where people can come together, share experiences, and advocate for change.



Feminist Housing Advocacy Strategies: How to Prepare for Election Results- Ange Valentini & Chi Nguyen

Housing justice is about more than just policy—it is about bringing people together, supporting personal and collective healing, and creating strong, connected communities. As we move forward, the work must be guided by compassion, understanding, and the recognition that true change happens through relationships and shared purpose.

The final session of the symposium focused on advocacy strategies, community organizing, and preparing for elections. Presenters Ange Valentini and Chi Nguyen shared their experiences working in government, activism, and community organizing, emphasizing the need for representation, grassroots action, and sustained political engagement to advance housing justice.

The Power of Representation and Advocacy

The discussion underscored the underrepresentation of women, people of color, and Indigenous peoples in government and how this absence impacts housing policies and funding decisions. Without diverse voices at decision-making tables, policies often fail to address the real needs of communities. The presenters stressed that political systems, particularly at the federal level, remain patriarchal and challenging to navigate—but through collective action and sisterhood, change is possible.

Building Connection and Community Power

One of the key strategies for effective advocacy is proximity and connection—organizing within local communities to create strong networks of support. Participants were encouraged to build relationships with neighbors, community centers, and local decision-makers to cultivate a shared sense of purpose and power. This kind of localized organizing strengthens advocacy efforts, making it easier to mobilize around key issues.

Scaling Local Wins to Drive Broader Change

Advocacy starts at the community level, where direct impacts can be seen and felt. Small victories—such as securing longer pedestrian crossing times for seniors—can inspire and empower communities to take on larger systemic issues. As individuals and groups build their advocacy skills and campaign experience, they can scale up their efforts to influence policy at higher levels of government.

Engaging Local Government for Immediate Impact

While federal and provincial governments control much of the housing budget, local governments are the most accessible and can have an immediate impact

on communities. Participants were encouraged to engage with municipal officials, apply for city grants, and push for changes in local housing policies. By building strong relationships with local representatives, communities can create sustainable, people-centered solutions.

Overcoming Political Barriers

Advocacy often involves navigating hostile or unresponsive governments. When faced with political roadblocks, the presenters emphasized continued organizing, media engagement, and strategic partnerships. Tactics such as public demonstrations, engaging with local businesses, and holding policymakers accountable through media coverage were highlighted as ways to push for change despite resistance.

Key Takeaways

- **Representation matters:** More diverse voices in government lead to better policies that reflect real community needs.
- **Start local:** Small wins in local organizing build confidence and skills for larger policy advocacy.
- **Community power is essential:** Connecting with neighbors, activists, and community leaders strengthens advocacy efforts.
- **Engage municipal governments:** Local officials have the most direct influence on housing and community development.
- **Persistence is key:** When faced with a hostile government, sustained organizing, media pressure, and coalition-building can create change.





Moving Forward

The presentation portion of the session closed with a call to action: get involved, organize locally, build relationships, and advocate for policies that center feminist, anti-racist, and community-driven solutions to housing justice. As the political landscape remains uncertain, solidarity and collective action will be critical in shaping the future of housing policy in Canada.

Following up from the presentation, attendees were invited to get into groups and discuss advocacy strategies they'd like to take from the symposium back to their communities. Attendees were encouraged to brainstorm strategies and paths forward for leading advocacy in their communities. These are some key pieces that emerged from that discussion:

- **All Governments Need Activists:** Regardless of political alignment, governments benefit from engaged activists who provide critical feedback, innovative solutions, and accountability. Advocacy plays a crucial role in pushing decision-makers to do better, even when they are resistant to change.
- **All Change Starts Locally, and Incremental Work is Valuable:** Local organizing is the foundation of larger systemic change. Small victories at the municipal level build collective power, skills, and confidence, creating momentum for larger, bolder initiatives. Forming coalitions with diverse partners strengthens advocacy efforts and makes policy change more achievable and sustainable.
- **Seize Opportunities for Action:** Advocates must act when opportunities arise, rather than waiting for permission. Proactive engagement and bold decision-making ensure that important issues gain visibility and traction.
- **Identify and Engage Key Allies:** Building relationships with aligned sponsors, organizations, and stakeholders strengthens advocacy campaigns. Identifying those who benefit most from policy change creates mutually supportive partnerships that enhance collective impact.
- **Build Respectful Relationships with Decision-Makers:** Effective advocacy requires constructive engagement with policymakers. Approaching decision-makers as collaborative partners, rather than adversaries, increases the likelihood of meaningful policy shifts. Trust, respect, and persistence are key to developing productive relationships in government spaces.
- **Stay Connected and Celebrate Wins:** Sustained advocacy relies on community connection and shared storytelling. Celebrating small victories keeps momentum alive, especially in challenging political climates. By

supporting one another and recognizing progress, advocates can maintain hope, resilience, and long-term impact.

Closing Ceremony – Day 2

On Day 1 of the PCVWH Symposium, Elder Marie McGregor Pitawanakwat offered closing prayers in Anishinaabemowin and English. Elder Marie's prayer focused on participants taking care of themselves as a day of hard work comes to an end and encouraged participants to keep working together, to keep their hopes high and carry the vision forward for seven generations on. Knowledge Keepers Pamela Spurvey and Tracey McKinnon sang, drummed to the water song. The song is a message to express gratitude for water and to protect water for future generations. Knowledge keepers smudged for all participants.

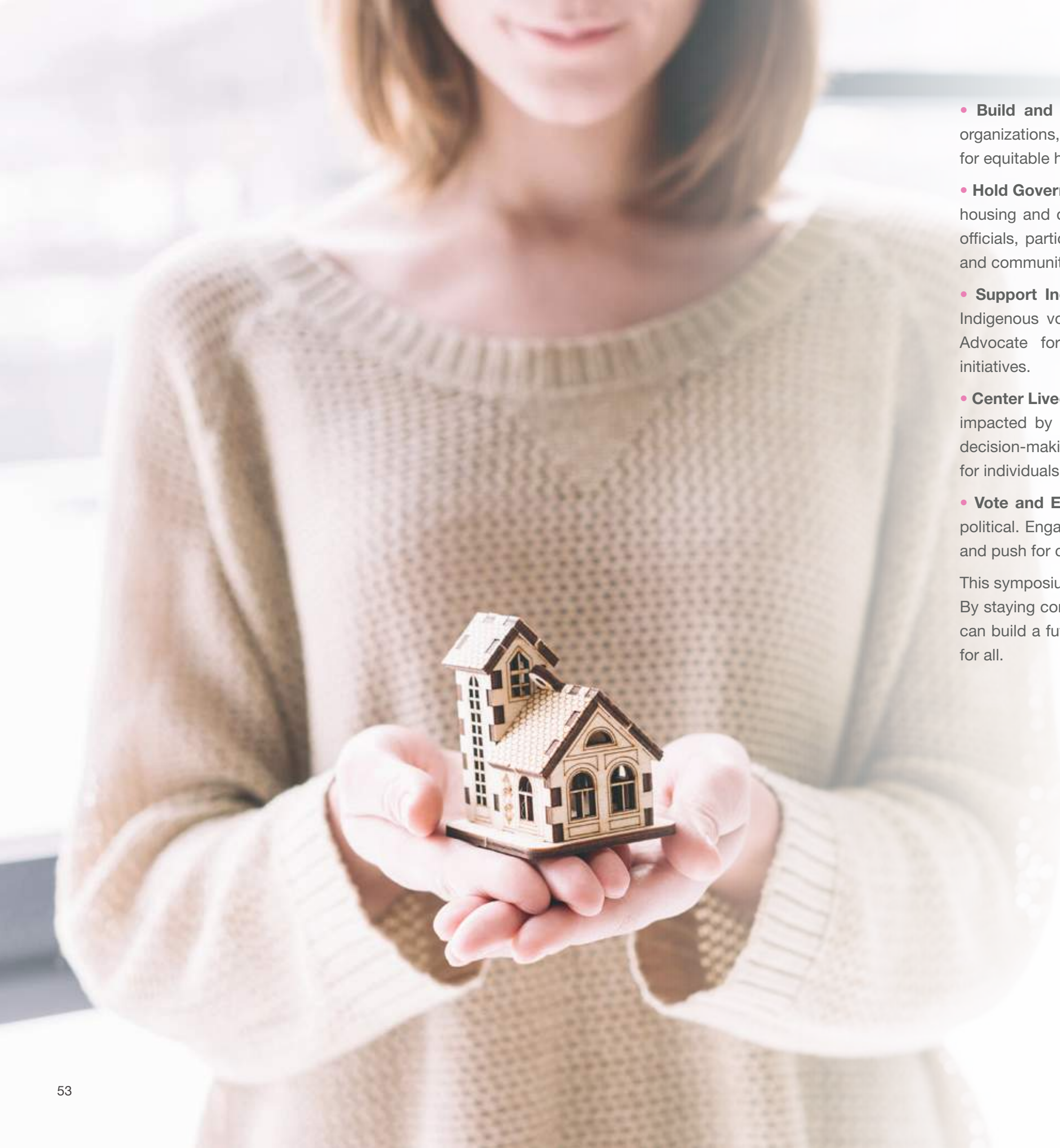
Carrying the work forward

The PCVWH symposium continues to provide a powerful platform for learning, dialogue, and collective action in the fight for gender and housing justice. Through shared experiences, insightful discussions, and strategic advocacy approaches, participants deepened their understanding of the systemic barriers to housing and the urgent need for policy change. The conversations reinforced that housing is not just a social issue but a fundamental human right, and achieving meaningful progress requires bold, sustained efforts at all levels of society.

As we move forward, there are concrete actions that participants can take to carry this work beyond the symposium:

- **Engage in Local Advocacy:** Change starts at the community level. Attend city council meetings, advocate for tenant rights, and support local housing initiatives. Small actions create the foundation for larger systemic shifts.





- **Build and Strengthen Coalitions:** Collaboration is key. Partner with organizations, grassroots movements, and allies to amplify voices and push for equitable housing policies.
- **Hold Governments Accountable:** Stay informed about policies affecting housing and demand action from decision-makers. Connect with elected officials, participate in public consultations, and advocate for transparent and community-led solutions.
- **Support Indigenous Sovereignty in Housing Solutions:** Ensure that Indigenous voices are at the forefront of housing projects and policies. Advocate for funding models that prioritize Indigenous-led housing initiatives.
- **Center Lived Experience in Policy and Advocacy Work:** People directly impacted by housing insecurity and homelessness must be included in decision-making processes. Support leadership development opportunities for individuals with lived experience.
- **Vote and Encourage Political Engagement:** Housing policy is deeply political. Engage in elections, educate your community on housing issues, and push for candidates who prioritize housing justice.

This symposium reaffirmed that change is possible when we work together. By staying connected, continuing the conversations, and taking action, we can build a future where safe, affordable, and dignified housing is a reality for all.