

Women-Centred Housing Design Interim Project Report

Engaging women with lived experiences of
violence and housing experts to explore design
solutions



September 2022



BC Society of
Transition Houses

Acknowledgements

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With Gratitude we recognize that the BC Society of Transition Houses' office is located on unceded Coast Salish territory, shared by the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) and sə́lilwətaʔt/ Selilwitulh (Tseil-Waututh) Nations.

This project would not have been possible without participation and contribution of women who shared their valuable lived experiences and time. We would like to acknowledge also the contributions and commitment of the housing expert participants, the National Occupancy Standards (NOS) Working Group and the Advisory Committee members who offered their knowledge and expertise of suitable and culturally appropriate housing design. Also, thanks to the workshop co-facilitators who supported the co-creation sessions.

Thank you to Tanyss Knowles and Amy FitzGerald who recognized the needs and necessity of a women-centred approach to designing suitable long-term housing.

Also, we thank the funders of this project, the Catherine Donnelley Foundation, the Real Estate Foundation of BC and the Women's Shelters Canada for generously supporting this project.



¹ How to cite this report: Akbarnejad, G., Godard, L., Ashlie, K., & FitzGerald, A.S. (2022). *Women-Centred Housing Design Interim Project Report: Engaging women with lived experiences of violence and housing experts to explore design solutions*. BC Society of Transition Houses. <https://bcsth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/WCD-Interim-Report.pdf>

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1. Introduction

The Women-Centred Housing Design project led by the BC Society of Transition Houses (BCSTH) aims to identify principles and strategies in designing long-term housing that is suitable and appropriate for women and their children after leaving violence. Particularly this project seeks to understand what suitability in housing means to women with lived experiences by amplifying their voices through consultation and those of the housing providers and experts that support them. The principles and strategies in this project will inform the housing sector who are embarking on providing long-term housing for this underserved population.

1.1. Background and Rationale

The Women-Centred Housing Design project emerged out of previous BCSTH housing projects including the Getting Home Project. These previous projects highlighted that affordability, financial barriers, and discrimination are only a few of the barriers to accessing long-term housing for women and children with experiences of violence. Housing suitability, access to appropriate housing options, and standards that define housing suitability (i.e., National Occupancy Standard) are other important challenges in meeting the long-term housing needs for women and their children/dependents.

One of the policies used in Canada to manage allocation of provincial social housing subsidies to the right candidates and to measure and assess how well housing needs are met is Core Housing Need created by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). Core Housing Need was first used in 1991 census and CMHC defines it using three main indicators of Affordability², Adequacy³, and Suitability (Ashlie, 2022; CMHC, 2019; Labahn & Salama, 2018; McCandless, 2020). According to data from 2021, 12.5% of all household types and 22% of renter households in British Columbia (BC) were in Core Housing Need, meaning their housing did not meet one or more of the three standards stated earlier and they had to spend 30% or more of their before-tax income to access acceptable local housing (Statistics Canada, 2022a).

Housing suitability, according to the CMHC, refers to whether a household is living in a suitable home according to the National Occupancy Standards (NOS)⁴. The NOS refers to whether a dwelling has enough bedrooms for the size and composition of the family (number of family

² "Housing is considered to be affordable when housing costs less than 30% of before-tax household income." (CMHC, 2019).

³ Housing is adequate if it is not in need of major repairs (e.g., defective plumbing or electrical wiring, or structural repairs to walls, floors, or ceilings) (CMHC, 2019).

⁴ According to NOS "1. There shall be no more than 2 or less than 1 person per bedroom; 2. Spouses and couples share a bedroom; 3. Parents do not share a bedroom with children; 4. Dependents aged 18 or more do not share a bedroom; 5. Dependents aged 5 or more of the opposite sex do not share a bedroom." (BC Housing, 2022; CMHC, 2019).

members, their gender, and age). As of 2021, 12% of one-parent one-family households whose reference person is a woman+ in Canada lived in unsuitable situation (Statistics Canada, 2022b). The NOS were introduced in the 1985 Housing Act and were adopted by housing providers as guidelines for efficient allocation of available social housing units by the 1990s. In the housing context, occupancy standards are also used to prevent overcrowding and health concerns (e.g., due to lack of ventilation), and to ensure sufficient privacy and safety of the residents (Ashlie, 2022). BC Housing uses the NOS to guide eligibility qualifications for subsidized housing applicants and they are also followed by CMHC. Although not all housing providers abide by the NOS, because of the usage by BC Housing and CMHC, many Co-ops, not-for-profit housing providers and private landlords apply them as standards in deciding who lives in their housing. The strict adherence of the NOS by housing providers has led to disproportionate, negative consequences and additional barriers for racialized populations including Indigenous peoples, refugees and newcomers, multi-generational families, and women and their children after leaving violence to access long-term housing. This is especially impacting them negatively due to their different cultural and living arrangements and socio economic preferences of leading certain lifestyle (e.g., living communally), and household size of these communities compared to those of a typical nuclear family. NOS also makes the suitability of housing for families, including a woman and her children, dependent merely on its number of bedrooms. Although advocates are currently raising these issues to address the barriers created by the NOS, this project discusses that there are also considerations and opportunities in the design of housing which can lead to enhancing the suitability of living spaces for women and their dependents. It is vital to relax the requirements around the NOS and use them as a flexible guide instead of a rule. Simultaneously, it is important to focus on building and designing suitable and culturally appropriate long-term housing using an intersectional women-centred lens by amplifying women's voices on what is suitable and appropriate for them.

Approaching access to affordable and suitable long-term housing from a design perspective is vital because:

- There are not enough 3+ bedroom rental homes available within BC to meet the number of families requiring them (based on NOS requirements) and the waitlists for subsidized housing through BC Housing are very long (Knowles et al., 2019).
- The existing larger units (3+ rooms) are not affordable for many families.
- Traditionally, apartments and houses have been mostly designed around a nuclear family (two parents and two children) which may not be efficient and aligned with the needs of women with children and/or dependents and are not inclusive of other cultural, lifestyle, and living arrangements (i.e., multigenerational families). Moreover,

children may live part-time with their mothers due to co-parenting arrangements, which may impact their space needs and priorities⁵.

The history of developing housing that reflects the needs of women in Vancouver and Canada dates to the 1970s and 1980s. Service providers, housing advocacy groups, and women's community groups worked to address the housing disparities faced by women. Examples of the housing that has been developed includes temporary options such as Emergency Shelters, Safe Homes, Transition Houses, Second and Third Stage Housing, and permanent housing, such as social housing and Co-operative housing (Wekerle, 1993). The Women-Centred Housing Design project focuses on long-term and permanent housing which is defined as "living in a home as long as one is willing to without worrying or being forced to leave" (Sprague, 1991, p. 28). This type of housing is accompanied by dignity, self-determination, self-esteem, autonomy, belonging, and self-expression (Brunn, 2019; Sprague, 1991, p. 28) and helps women to transition to secure and stable housing after leaving temporary housing.

This project explores the question of what housing suitability means to women-led families after leaving violence beyond the definitions of Core Housing Need and NOS. Based on the current literature and conversations with BCSTH's advisory groups and committees and women with lived experience, suitable and appropriate women-centred housing should not only be limited to the specifics of NOS but also include other aspects of space design (e.g., safety and security, access to services and neighbourhood context) (Sprague, 1991; Whitzman & Desroches, 2020; Zinni, 2019). With this in mind, this project takes an intersectional lens to the housing space design needs of women that includes their experiences of violence and trauma, gender, single parenting, family size and composition, lifestyle, and age and needs of children. Findings of this study are the results of a co-creation⁶ process, engaging women with lived experiences of violence and consultation with housing experts (e.g., developers, architects, and housing providers). These findings will be complemented by best practices and pilot site feasibility research and seek to offer potential solutions and useful design strategies to the housing sector to develop and retrofit housing spaces that are intentionally designed and suitable for this population. Therefore, while the supply of appropriate and affordable housing

⁵ For example, when children live part-time with their mothers, some of the spaces can be used by the mother or other members of the family for different purposes (e.g., workspace) while the child is spending their time with the other parent. This arrangement provides more flexible use of space compared to when children spend 100% of their time with the mother and require their own space most of the time. In this case, BC Housing has guidelines used in the application of NOS which does not reduce any of the existing constraints. According to that, "a dependent child who resides with their parent(s) a minimum of 40 percent of the time will qualify as a permanent member of the household when determining eligibility and appropriate unit size." (BC Housing, 2022).

⁶ Co-creation is a broad term and referred to any act of collective creativity (i.e., shared by two or more people) (Sanders & Stappers, 2008).

should be increased, solutions found in this project will guide the new developments and housing interventions towards purpose-built and gender-sensitive design for this community.

2. Community Engagement

To implement a women-centred housing design process, engagement for this project occurred in two stages. First, we engaged women with lived experiences of having difficulties accessing suitable and appropriate housing for their families after violence. We sought to prioritize a participatory approach (i.e., user as partner) over a user-centred approach (i.e., user as subject) (Sanders & Stappers, 2008) meaning that women were engaged in the early stages of the design process, rather than asking for their feedback once the housing experts decided about design ideas. The goals of this engagement were:

- To explore and understand the housing space needs of women;
- To explore and co-create women-centred solutions and priorities;
- To design and test a co-creation housing design process with women with lived experiences.

After hearing from the community of women, this project sought to hear from housing experts that have experience in providing and designing housing for women with experiences of violence to explore the solutions and feasibility of ideas shared by the women with lived experiences.

2.1. Workshop with women with lived experiences of leaving violence

The first workshop was focused on engaging women with lived experience to understand their long-term housing space needs and to explore solutions. Participant recruitment occurred in April and May 2022 through BCSTH's Member Programs and Services⁷. We sought to recruit self-identified women with lived experience of leaving violence who:

- had personal experiences with housing that did not meet their family's space needs, and
- were interested in sharing their experiences and exploring solutions in a collaborative workshop setting.

⁷ BCSTH Member Programs & Services include Transition, Second and Third Stage Houses, Safe Homes, PEACE and Violence is Preventable programs across BC.

Participants were invited from a combination of those living in both short-term (e.g., transition house) and long-term housing in order to include diverse experiences and voices of women who were in different stages of their life after leaving violence.

We designed this co-creation and engagement process to be inclusive and violence- and trauma-informed by reducing barriers to participation. The two-hour workshop was facilitated online through *Zoom*. The interactive activities were available through a hybrid format so that participants could share their ideas on the *Mural* platform or through *Zoom* based on their preferences. The instruction and information on the workshop discussion questions were shared with participants before and during the workshop. The online nature of the session was aimed to enable people from different communities in BC to join the workshop.

Participants were paid a \$75 honorarium in recognition of their time and participation. Due to the workshop taking place during the lunch hour, workshop participants were offered lunch vouchers. Also, childcare assistance was provided to women upon request. To protect the privacy of participants, the session was not recorded. However, detailed notes were taken in order to ensure that all of the details and ideas were accurately captured. Clinical counselling was made available to participants during the day of workshop. Although the workshop activities did not ask about the history of violence, some women shared about their past trauma while talking about their housing needs and solutions as these experiences were interconnected. Some of the participants reached out to the counsellor after the workshop.

14 participants joined the workshop. Participants were also invited to complete a short, optional online demographic survey to learn how background characteristics impact their housing experiences and needs. 11 out of 14 participants completed the demographic survey.

2.2. Workshop with housing experts

After the housing design workshop with women with lived experiences, a preliminary analysis of the results identified the main themes and ideas that emerged out of the discussions. Participants for the second workshop were recruited from the housing sector, including housing providers, architects, developers, and experts in the area of developing housing with a social purpose and/or for women-led families or women fleeing violence.

14 participants joined this session including experts from not-for-profit housing organizations, housing service and program providers, development and planning organizations, architecture firms, academic researchers, policy and housing experts, members from advocacy, support, and training sector, and land development sector.

2.3. Important design aspects and themes

The main themes explored in the workshops with women with lived experiences and the housing sector were as follows and were kept broad enough to let opportunity for exploration. In order to make the design concepts accessible to lived experience participants, we provided some examples of the needs and solutions as well as housing space images to facilitate the conversations.

1. Security and Safety: This theme explores how women's perception of a safe and secure home considering their past experiences of violence and trauma can be reflected in the design of their long-term living environment. Another aspect of safety relates to the needs of women with small children and the ways design features can protect children from physical hazards.

2. In-unit living spaces: This theme explores the suitability and appropriateness of the housing within the private territory of units. It seeks to understand how flexibility, adaptability, and accessibility can be reflected in the design of in-unit spaces towards a functional and efficient space which at the same time meets the needs for privacy, comfort, and a home-like environment for women and their children.

3. In-building amenities and shared spaces: This theme explores how building amenities and shared spaces can be designed, as well as the ways in which it contributes to providing a therapeutic environment for women and their children, where safe connections with their neighbourhood community can occur. This topic also focuses on the functionality of spaces outside of the family's unit and the ways they can be an alternative for some of the in-unit spaces due to lack of space.

4. Location in terms of access to neighbourhood services and amenities: Locations of long-term housing for women and their children matters especially in terms of easy access to services that are important to them such as childcare, parks, health care and grocery stores. Exploring what amenities/services are vital from their perspective and the ways to improve access was the goal of this theme.

3. Results and Findings

3.1. Demographic characteristics and NOS implications

11 out of 14 participants completed the demographic survey, the results of which are shown in the figures below:

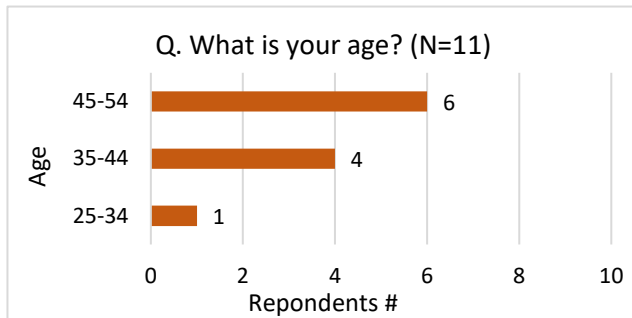


Figure 1: Age

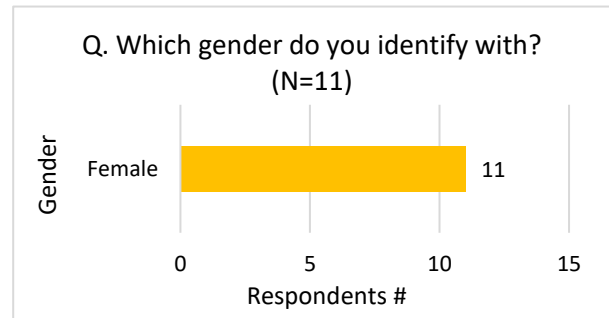


Figure 2: Gender

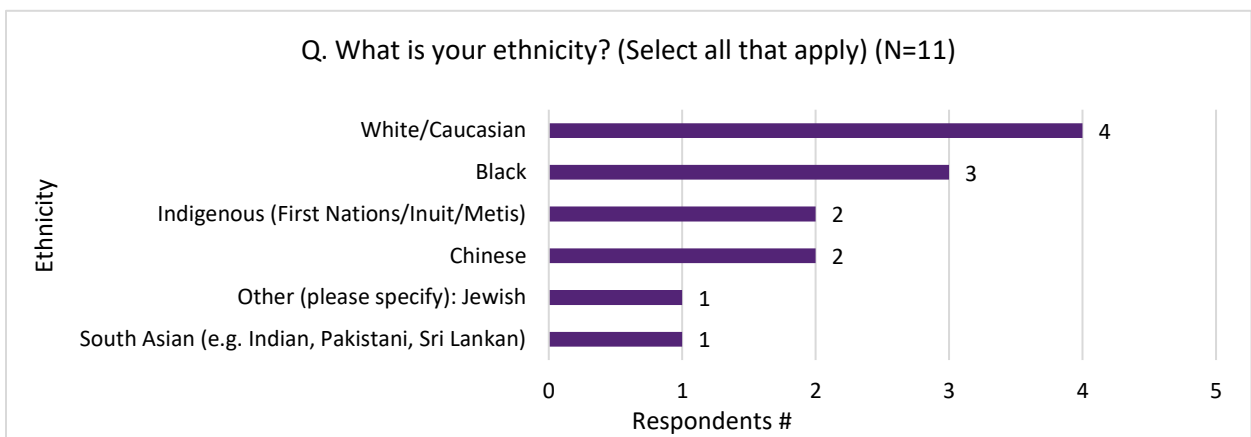


Figure 3: Ethnicity

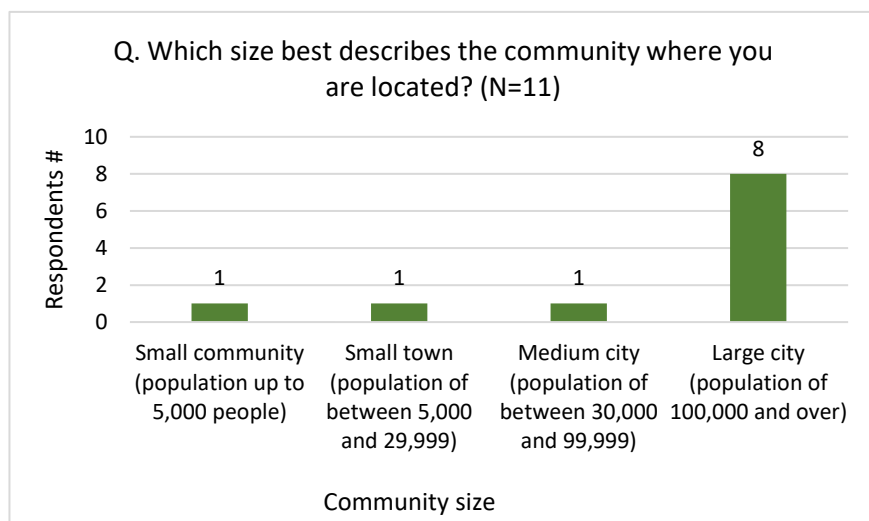


Figure 4: Community size

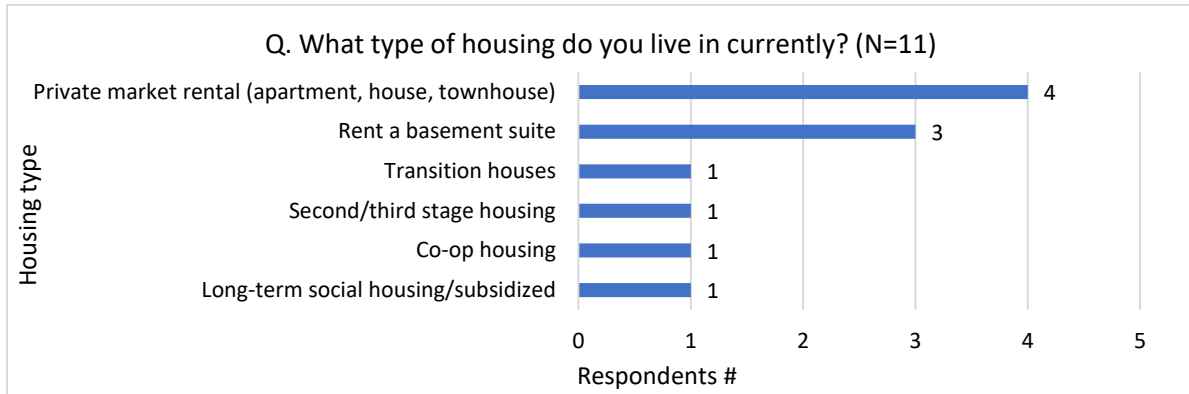


Figure 5: Housing type

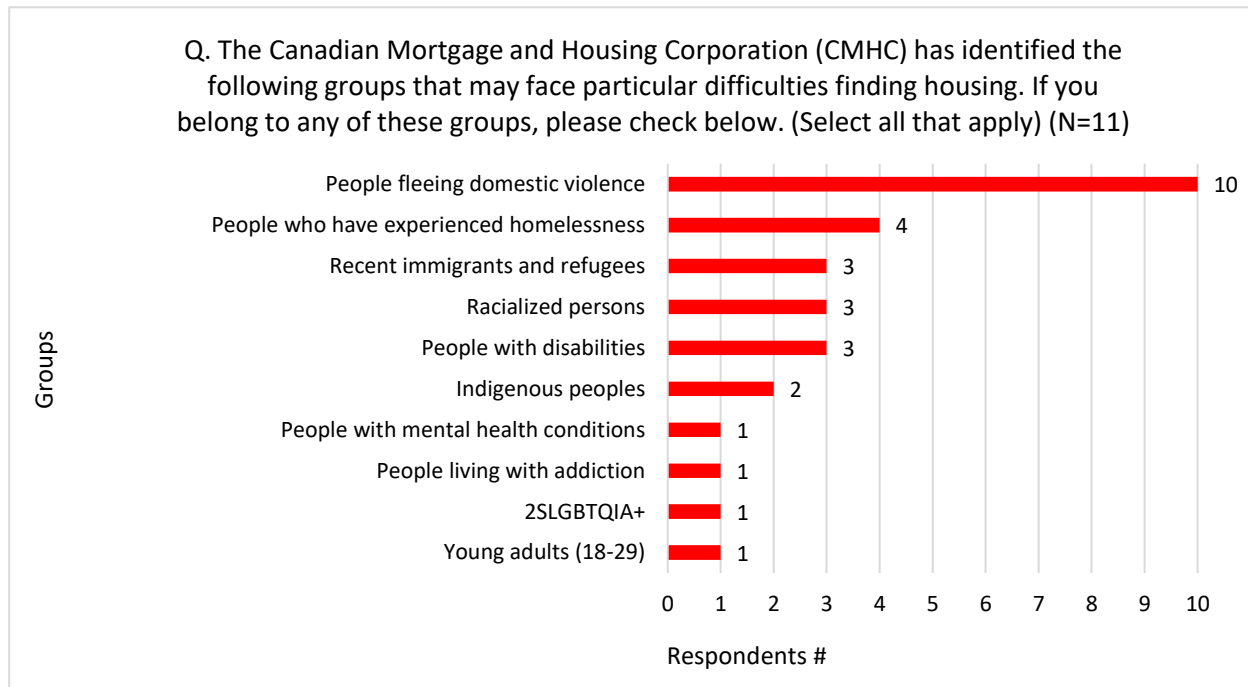


Figure 6: Vulnerable groups of priority

According to the above data from the survey:

- All respondents' ages ranged from 25 to 54 years old;
- They were diverse in terms of ethnicity (White, Black, Indigenous, Chinese, South Asian, Jewish).
- Participants rented long-term housing or lived in a temporary housing option. Those in long-term rental mostly lived in private market rentals (4 out of 11) and only 2 of respondents reported living in affordable community housing (co-op and subsidized).

- In addition to having experiences of violence, some participants identified themselves in other vulnerable groups including people with experiences of homelessness⁸, being recent immigrant and refugees, racialized persons, and people with disabilities as the most frequent categories.

Participants also responded to the survey questions asking about their household size and composition (age and gender of their dependents) and their housing and unit types. These questions were asked to understand the extent to which NOS requirements are being met and/or if women and their children are under-housed (live in crowded situations). Based on the responses from 11 participants:

- Women lived with 1 to 8 children/dependent/non-dependent family members or shared their home with another roommate.
- Two mothers indicated their children live with them part-time or 50% of the time.
- Participants lived in 1-, 2-, or 3-bedroom units. Only 5 out of the 11 lived in suitable units according to NOS and the rest lived in overcrowded situations. The figure below shows respondents' housing type in terms of their number of bedrooms, their suitability, compared to what is expected according to the NOS guidelines.

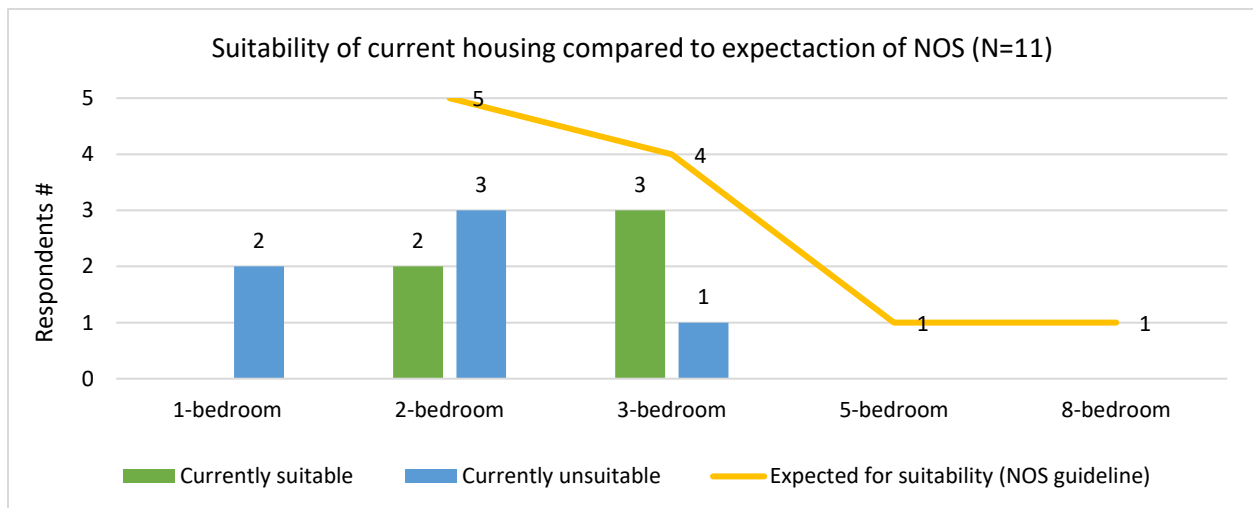


Figure 7: Suitability of participants' current housing based on NOS

⁸ In this question, although we did not use the term "chronic homelessness", we assume that some respondents may have interpreted this answer choice as such due to the low rate of those who identified themselves as people with experiences of homelessness. This study suggests that in order to include the hidden aspect of homelessness experiences (e.g., living in temporary housing), future studies add the following note: "homelessness describes the situation of an individual, family or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it." (Gaetz et al., 2012).

3.2. Housing space needs and solutions

In the consultations, we explored long-term housing space needs, challenges and solutions with women with lived experiences and further built on the solution ideas and their feasibility in the workshop with the housing sector. The conversations occurred around the four main themes listed in the section 2.3. The following sections provide a summary of the main needs and problems and the corresponding solutions identified in the consultations. The tables below only include the findings of this project consultation and is not an exhaustive and comprehensive list of existing strategies and actions.

Also, there were ideas and solutions offered by participants which were mostly related to the policies and programs that can be adopted within their housing towards a women-centred housing rather than solely design of the spaces. For example, women with lived experiences and housing experts both brought up ideas such as guest policies for residents to allow flexibility for their friends and family to stay if they wish to, programs for children, and support circles for residents. These programs and policies can be supported and created by housing providers/operators. This project acknowledges that housing space design alone does not lead to a suitable and appropriate housing environment for anyone, including women after violence. The ways in which housing spaces are activated and utilized through the coordination and community development programming (e.g., community gardens, social events for residents), and policies in buildings (e.g., pet policies) are vital to incorporate a women-centred and trauma- and violence-informed lens.

1. Security and Safety

“Affordable housing is often in high crime areas. Children are exposed to crime. Safe location is very important.” Workshop participant (woman with lived experience)

In the workshop with women with lived experiences, we asked them to respond to the questions: *What are some spaces in your building and unit that make you feel insecure and unsafe? And What would you like to be done in your building to make you and your children feel more safe and secure and what would you like to be different in terms of security in your building?*

In the workshop with the housing sector, we built on what emerged out of the conversations with women with lived experience and asked: *What are some space design considerations, ideas, and examples you know to make housing spaces/models more safe and secure for mothers and their children?*

Problems/needs	Solutions (women with lived experience)	Solutions (housing experts)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Security issues in ground floor and basement units <i>e.g., “Ex being abusive has come to my basement many times and harassed me and children when I had to call the police.”</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Buildings to be gated* - Courtyard model** 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fenced space around building and metal gate that protects ground level units* - Balconies that open onto an Internal courtyard rather than onto a public area. However, the courtyard model is more expensive due to more external walls** - Motion sensor lights - When retrofitting existing buildings, plant more trees and bigger fences to increase privacy - Appropriate lighting around and outside of the property and townhouse units - Window blinds - Do not allocate first floor units to women and children with experiences of violence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Security of the building’s location and model <i>e.g., “Surrounded by SROs (needles at playground, crime, break ins). Not about NIMBYism, just an issue of safety.”</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Housing co-ops in safe areas* - Non-segregated women/family only housing. Integrated housing is safer - Housing to be away from major streets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Housing co-ops* - Security system and panic buttons - Limiting number of entrances to building to control security - Dedicated one level to women and children with no amenity and common space in that floor - Vandal proof lighting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Security of shared and common spaces in the building <i>e.g., “The downstairs lobby is all glass. My neighbours let in strangers (including delivery dudes), this used to worry me.”</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enough lighting in parking lots/ post boxes/ garbage area, etc.* - Security cameras on floors and main entrance** - Secure buzzer system*** - Shared outdoor space on upper floors - Underground storage that is only accessed by residents - Gated parking - Intercom without the unit’s # 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lighting outside the building and in the shared areas (e.g., stairways)* - Security cameras** - Smart doorbells (video) for townhouse/duplex*** - Units that overlook outdoor play areas - Outdoor play areas that are separate from parking areas - Minimizing hiding spots in corridors - Spaces facing the streets to be allocated to shared spaces, while

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reducing glass in the lobby for more privacy of who lives in the building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> internal courtyard facing the units with access to safe children play area - Outdoor parking spaces should be visible to residents (i.e., eyes on the streets) - Dedicated shared amenity space within housing for women and children in building - Having a storage room in the unit and having a storage room for big items in the shared area
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Safety of children from physical hazards <i>e.g., "Large windows are so helpful, but with child safe ways of opening...always worried my toddler will fall out."</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bars on the windows* - Kitchen with a view into the living-room area to watch kids while doing household chores** - Having lock on the doors out of the reach of small children - Built-in childproofing on kitchen/bathroom cupboards drawers, etc. - Retractable built-in baby gate for kitchen - Built-in shelves out of reach of small children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vertical bars on the windows (which does not feel institutional)* - Open concept to monitor kids but some privacy too (e.g., pass-throughs)** - Decks and patio spaces allow safe spaces for children to play that can also be monitored by parents - Having windows which open at the top which are safer for children and considering accessibility challenges for people with disabilities - Decks and patio space that can be monitored by parents and also safe for children - Juliet balcony for safety of windows - Temperature control on hot water - Outdoor play areas that are separate from parking areas - Safe stair design for townhouses/ lofts

*, **, ... Similar solutions suggested by women with lived experiences and housing experts

2. In-unit living spaces

"Moms leaving violence have a lot to consider and dealing with housing and space makes that even harder." Workshop participant (woman with lived experience)

To explore this theme, we asked women to respond to the questions: *What are some of the barriers and challenges in using the in-unit spaces of your home (e.g., kitchen, bedroom, living room, storage, bathroom, laundry, entrance) and how do they relate to the National Occupancy*

Standards? And What are some of the solutions to the problems you identified in each of these spaces above?

In the workshop with the housing sector, we built on what emerged out of the conversation with women with lived experience and asked: *What are some space design ideas in the housing units to make the life of mothers and their children after violence easier in the following spaces (kitchen, bedroom, living room, storage, bathroom, laundry, entrance)?*

Problems/needs	Solutions (women with lived experience)	Solutions (housing experts)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of private living/workspace for family and visiting members, NOS considerations <i>e.g., "Two kids and me in a 2-bedroom, different genders, so I will sleep in living room and give kids both bedrooms."</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Affordable rentable guest suites* - Culturally appropriate** - Moving walls/dividers to make more bedrooms, larger living or multifunctional spaces - Sliding room for the bathroom, in-unit laundry space, and bedrooms to save space - Access to private covered outdoor space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Space to have guests who stay for a while* - In law suites* - Housing that is reflective of cultural practices of the community. Some families want to share king sized bed/bed so they want a larger bedroom space rather than multiple small bedrooms** - Lock-off doors to adjacent units to allow families to increase/decrease in size** - Adaptable furniture that has dual functions - Having 3-bed and 1-bed units adjacent for expansion - Study space/desk space to support working from home, homework, hobbies - Nook under the stairs - Loft beds/murphy beds to provide floor space for playing - In-suite storage unit combined with laundry or flex space can be used for home office
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appliances for comfort <i>e.g., "In-unit laundry would save me so much time as a single mom."</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In-unit laundry* - Low-maintenance and high-quality materials and appliances** - Dishwasher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In-suite laundry* - In-suite laundry has challenges and costs, however for 3-4 bedroom units it is reasonable* - Durable, washable surfaces** - Vinyl plank flooring - Less carpet

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lighting provided in each room - Bench outside front door - Child safe blinds - Shoe driers for large families - In-unit cooling/AC - Colours/surfaces that do not show dirt - Low-cost/energy efficient heating to keep bills low - Blackout blinds
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of closet and in-unit storage <p><i>e.g., "There are only 2 closets for us all (me and my 3 children). I have to keep my toddler's clothes in 2 drawers! And my older kids get annoyed their clothes getting mixed up as the closet is so small."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Built-in shelves for toys and books* - Storage space for stroller and kids' accessories** - More cupboards in the kitchen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Built-in shelving/storage* - Storage rooms/closets** - Enough room at the entrance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sound proofing issues <p><i>e.g., "Landlord has their kitchen right on top of my room and they cook every day at 3am and create lots of noise."</i></p>	Not identified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When retrofitting an existing building, plant more trees and bigger fences to increase sound proofing outside noise - Acoustic considerations in the shared amenity units adjacent to apartment units
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Homelike features <p><i>e.g., "Space that allows for a sense of "home" for your children (not clinical or sterile in application)."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bathtub* - Built-in shelves for plants - Spaces to store personal and confidential paperwork (e.g., legal documents) that can be locked and out of reach of children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bathroom with bathtubs to bathe children* - Identifiable front door (e.g., different colours) - Rotating art display space (e.g., chalk boards, pin-up boards) - Cozy, warm, and natural materials

*, **, ... Similar solutions suggested by women with lived experiences and housing experts

3. In-building amenities and shared spaces

"It would be a dream to be able to afford a home with a yard and laundry onsite, but with the cost of living these days, that dream seems bleak and unreachable." Workshop participant (woman with lived experience)

To explore this theme, we asked women to respond to the questions: *What kinds of amenities and shared spaces do you need or not need in your building and why (e.g., party room, rooftop garden, lounge, study room, parking, storage room, in-building laundry)? And What would you change about your in-building amenities to make it more functional and/or sociable for you and your family?*

In the workshop with the housing sector, we built on what emerged out of the conversation with women with lived experience and asked: *How should amenity spaces in long-term housing for women and their children be designed to meet the functional and social needs of mothers and their children?*

Problems/needs	Solutions (women with lived experience)	Solutions (housing experts)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to on-site/semi-private nature <i>e.g., "Nature is a form of therapy. Many women are grappling with emotional distress and need access to nature."</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On-site community garden* - Roof top gardens* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gardens to support cultural/medicinal plants* - Water spray park for heat waves
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alternatives for lack of in-unit spaces <i>e.g., "Children are growing fast. (Need a new big bike every year but I don't have the money or space to store it)."</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small work space outside of the unit can be helpful* - On-site laundry** - Shared communal resources/equipment: Space to share tools; Bike hub/bike collective in the building: a collection of children's bikes in a variety of sizes in shared storage (with bike pump and tools) for children to use without adding expenses; other equipment i.e., camping chairs, etc.*** - Storage in parking area, above the vehicle - Safe deposit box that is coded access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bookable studio for women to use for work with access to computer, internet, etc.* - Shared laundry provides opportunity for multiple laundry units at the same time** - Tool/gear library builds collective use*** - Storage areas in halls can provide parking for strollers and other large items and allow families easy access. - Shared toys, etc. can help families enjoy time together without extra costs - Shared laundry is more efficient (e.g., maintenance) - Community pantry, shared meal spaces including food prep and food storage for community bulk buys - One to one unit to storage - Basement storage with accessibility considerations

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Study spaces on each floor (not one big room) with limited access to residents of that floor only - Emergency support hub for post-disaster (with food, air conditioning, backup power, communications) - Adaptable storage and bike storage in the parkade
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to amenity rooms, children’s play space, and social spaces <i>e.g., “Shared spaces for parents to have their kids play safely together. Kids like to run around and play in group.”</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shared kitchen/communal cooking* - On-site children’s play space with space for adults to mingle** - Benches and picnic tables*** - Breastfeeding considerations - Large living room, playroom, game room to share after school care - Party room to enable affordable birthday parties - Volunteer space for sharing skills and empowering women - Courtyard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lounge/amenity room with a full kitchen* - Shaded outdoor play space** - Variety of seating options*** - Diversity of amenity spaces (e.g., size, softness, furniture) - Change tables in the shared rooms - Utility sink - Space for older children (preteens and teens) to be active (e.g., basketball, skateboarding in the complex) - Amenity space next to the shared laundry where people can hangout, watch children play for connections and usability at the same time - Shared tool library builds community - Community pantry, shared food space - Amenity spaces that open into shared courtyard - Spaces to support artwork, hot-desking, yoga, and other activities - All shared washrooms have taps kids can reach, no automatic flushing, no loud hand dryers - Keep the shared amenities incomplete in order to let residents get engaged in shaping the space after they moved in according to their needs and interests - Library/reading areas (e.g., a chair in the corner of the hall with a book space)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to meeting rooms and on-site staff spaces <p><i>e.g., "Processing complicated things but had to happen in my home which should have been my sanctuary."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Neutral meeting space for visitor meetings (e.g., RCMP, social workers, and ex-partner) with an outside door with no access to the building* - On-site staff** 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meeting room accessible from the exterior of the building for visitors* - A private space to chat with support staff while staff can also oversee ins and outs of buildings**
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*, **, ... Similar solutions suggested by women with lived experiences and housing experts

4. Location in terms of access to neighbourhood services and amenities

"Because of income barriers, it's important that we can live in close proximity to community parks and amenities." Workshop participant (woman with lived experience)

To explore this theme, we asked women to respond to the questions: *What are the most important services you need in your neighbourhood (e.g., childcare, grocery store, park)? And What features do you look for when thinking about your ideal neighbourhood amenities and what values they bring to your life?*

In the workshop with the housing sector, we built on what emerged out of the conversations with women with lived experience and asked: *What are some of the ways to build long-term housing for women and their children that are more accessible to the neighbourhood services?*

Problems/needs	Solutions (women with lived experience)	Solutions (housing experts)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to nature <p><i>e.g., "We love nature. Nature heals us and we go daily, especially wild spaces."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Walkable parks and green space 	<p>Solutions in this section were mostly related to the roles of municipal policies and planning rather than design of building.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Food security <p><i>e.g., "Only expensive grocery stores are nearby. It is hard and heavy to schlep home groceries from affordable shops."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Walkable affordable grocery options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supporting online grocery services - Enable home businesses - Tuck shop or other essentials available on-site - Deep-freeze in units for households living in remote communities far from grocery stores
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to health care services <p><i>e.g., "Having different resources such as counseling, drug</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 24-hour pharmacy nearby - Counselling - Drug treatment - Doctors and nurses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Caregiver studio units in the building so people won't have to travel for health services

<p><i>treatment, doctors and nurses on hand and daycare or childminding for those in need while using resources (counseling etc.).”</i></p>		
<p>- Access to affordable childcare and school <i>e.g., “We have to live within walking distance of schools and daycare. We cannot afford bus passes and do not have a car. Very expensive.”</i></p>	<p>- Proximity to affordable childcare and school</p>	<p>- Having units large enough to accommodate a family/private daycare in the building (e.g., Brightside Community Homes Foundation and Entre Nous Femmes Housing Society) - Mixed-use building - Pedestrians calmed streets and safe access between schools/ childcare and housing</p>
<p>- Access to transportation <i>e.g., “Access to bus stops and bike paths are important.”</i></p>	<p>- Affordable and secure on-site parking - Access to bus stop - Access to bike path</p>	<p>- Providing space for car share programs on-site (e.g., Modo) - Bike share program close to the building (e.g., Shaw) - Providing bike repair space in the building - Community bikes in the neighbourhood to offer free bikes to those in need - Provide affordable housing in transit-oriented areas - Priority space in front of building for pick up and drop off - Transit board (e.g., live transit times/time table) - Shuttle services - Support safer/ bigger/ better lit bus stops - Prioritize active transportation design (e.g., walkable and bikeable neighbourhoods)</p>

**, **, ... Similar solutions suggested by women with lived experiences and housing experts*

4. Discussion

The majority of women with lived experiences reported that security from violence and crime should be the number one requirement and consideration in the design of housing spaces. They raised concerns about living with the fear of encountering their perpetrator and reported the importance of the safety of their neighbourhood/location of housing. Both lived experience

participants and housing experts brought up design ideas and ways that building access to strangers can be controlled and reduced (e.g., reducing number of entrances to building, gates). Although some women stated they prefer women-only housing, others disagreed and thought an integrated model provides a safer space for their children to thrive in an environment with other children who have not witnessed/experienced violence. Women also reflected different opinions about sociability of the building and necessity of social interactions. While some believed building social connections especially with the community was an important part of their recovery, some did not feel comfortable about it. These differences in preference raise the question of what level of security, surveillance, sociability, and demographic divide should be reflected in the housing design when it comes to the needs of women and their children with experiences of violence in a long-term housing setting. This type of housing does not have the same confidentiality and security level that temporary models (e.g., Transition Houses and Second Stage) have but still brings different opportunities and limitations that should consider a violence- and trauma- informed lens.

Efficient use of space (e.g., built-in shelves, sliding doors) and flexible and/or adaptable spaces can provide women and their children with practical living spaces and adaptable to their changing needs. Spaces with customized features allow families to utilize them and choose their lifestyle and privacy level based on their cultural and suitability preferences. These spaces can be further complemented and expanded by shared bookable spaces and amenities in the building to offset the lack of larger units. These include affordable guest suites, bookable office space, children's playroom, storage rooms, etc. Furthermore, high quality appliances and materials lead to less required repairs over time. They also enhance comfort and save mothers time and energy. For example, while shared laundry in the building are better justified in terms of costs and maintenance, allocating spaces and mechanical considerations for in-suite laundries of 3+ bedroom units would be reasonable for the comfort and convenience of larger families.

Nature and outdoor space within a building were identified as an important part of designing housing for women and children. Women found access to nature and safe outdoor spaces (e.g., onsite community gardens and children's playground) very useful and valuable for children and their mothers to connect.

Access to nearby and walkable childcare and schools was an important aspect of the surrounding neighbourhoods of a women-centred housing and an important factor in women's housing choices. This is an essential factor in provision of women-centred housing and allocation of land for it, since a mother after violence may be at risk of losing the custody of their children if they cannot find an appropriate home next to their children's care/school. Women also believed access to affordable grocery stores, healthcare, nature, and transportation were vital. Some of the ways that the design of housing could impact access to

services include providing some of the services onsite (e.g., childcare) and allocating space for them (e.g., assigning onsite parking for car/bike share programs). While the most important neighbourhood services needed in proximity of long-term affordable housing for women were articulated well in the workshops, solutions on how to achieve these goals were not fully captured. Many of the solutions in this regard relate to the roles that municipal zoning and urban and community planning play in the design of neighbourhoods (e.g., 15-minute/complete neighbourhood⁹). Some of the solutions of this kind that were captured by the housing experts include the importance of increasing multi-unit family zoning, requiring and prioritizing affordable housing in well accessed areas, and allowing fast-tracked housing developments when they meet Official Community Plans and simultaneously are affordable.

5. Conclusion and Next Steps

The findings in the previous sections summarized the women's housing design needs and solutions by both women with lived experiences and housing experts. The findings of this project illustrate that there are other important factors such as easy access to childcare and services and safety that Core Housing Need and NOS do not take into account when defining housing standards and suitability for women and their children after violence. In order to further develop and apply a women-centred lens to suitability and appropriateness of long-term housing, the next step of this project is to add the best practices research to the findings of the current study and create a women-centred long-term housing design toolkit. This toolkit will include principles, strategies, and actions accompanied by design templates and visuals. The toolkit will be piloted with two BCSTH member programs (one rural and one urban) to assess relevance, feasibility, applicability, ease of use of the design, and recommendations for the development and retrofitting of women-centred suitable and appropriate long-term housing.

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⁹ Complete communities or 15-minute neighbourhoods are areas where people can conduct the majority of their activities of daily life, work, and play and can access the services within a 15 minute walking/biking radius of their home.

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