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Chair

Mrs. Karen Vecchio

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the 116th meeting of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. This meeting, of course, is public.

Today we're going to continue our study on the system of shelters and transition housing serving women and children affected by violence against women and intimate partner violence.

I am pleased to welcome our two panellists to start our first hour. We have Bonnie Brayton, who is the national executive director for DisAbleD Women's Network Canada; as well as Arlene Hache, who is a community advocate.

We're going to start with seven-minute comments.

Bonnie, we'll begin with you.

Ms. Bonnie Brayton (National Executive Director, DisAbleD Women's Network Canada, As an Individual): Thank you, Karen, and members of the committee. Good afternoon.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are gathered on the territory of the Algonquin people with a reminder to all of us at we are in a time of truth and reconciliation with the first peoples of Canada. I would also like to state that I am a woman of the near-north, having been born in a small village on the border between Quebec and Labrador, and I'm honoured to be sharing this panel today with one of the two northern sisters who were going to be here today. Sadly, our other sister was not able to come.

It's my understanding the panel has also invited Pauktuutit, and I would really encourage you to pursue trying to get them in to testify. I know there was a possibility today. Pauktuutit is the women's organization that can provide the most important guidance and expertise in addressing the complete absence of response and resources currently across Canada for indigenous women and women in remote regions of the north.

I was invited here to speak to the current study on the system of shelters and transition houses in Canada, including federal programs and funding for shelters and transition houses, the gap between the number of beds required and the number of beds provided and possible solutions to that gap. DAWN Canada will be preparing a detailed brief that will provide the committee with research and strong recommendations to support major policy and program

reforms, not just for shelters and transition houses but more broadly, because this problem goes beyond beds and bricks and mortar.

Access to shelters and transition houses has been a central preoccupation for organizations serving women with disabilities for as long as they have existed—both the organizations and the shelters. DAWN Canada has conducted several national studies that confirm that the traditional shelter system is still not responding to our needs.

“Access” means different things to different people, and so does “disability”. In regard to disability, for years DAWN Canada has been saying that women are becoming disabled through violence. Finally, in 2018 we have data and research that confirms this terrible reality and the size and the scope of the problem, or at least it begins to.

Brain injury is a complex topic, because it has so many implications. Policy-makers are only now beginning to understand just how prevalent an issue this is. Recent and highly publicized data on the long-term impact of brain injuries, including brain injuries from sports or combat and in first responders, show that frequent blows to the head, sudden trauma, repeated trauma, all contribute to brain injury, to the onset of PTSD, which in and of itself creates physiological changes in the brain. Add to that car accidents, childhood accidents, and today's reality that most women who are showing up at shelters have almost certainly experienced violence more than once, more than twice. That they have been choked or hit or have been threatened or traumatized is a given, so brain injury is a huge issue in the context of violence against women today, including in the transition house and shelter system.

Our shelters and transition houses are already grossly under-resourced. They are often inaccessible. There are not enough of them, and they simply are not able to adequately deal with the population of women they are tasked with supporting. There is more on this in our brief, but I strongly encourage the committee to ensure they hear more from the subject matter experts in this field of research, including Angela Colantonio, who has done extensive research as part of an international working group. Angela has also worked with our colleagues from “WomenatthecentrE”, including Nneka MacGregor, whom I hope this committee will invite to speak as well.

A study they did in Toronto just two years ago revealed that between 35% and 80% of women entering the shelter system today in Canada likely have some type of brain injury. The low end is 35%. Think about that. It's one-third at the low end, and that's early data.

Intellectual disability also places women, including young women and girls, at high risk of repeated violence and abuse. The stigma, and quite simply, the poor screening for milder intellectual disabilities and learning disabilities, especially in girls, is one reason that these same women become hugely overrepresented in the homeless community, in a range of human trafficking contexts and in the prison population.

I would like to ask this committee to read our brief when it comes. Be better informed of the facts, not what you think you know. DAWN Canada uses four pillars: research, education, policy and advocacy. We are not here to do your job for you, just to make sure you are properly informed.

• (1535)

How many of you know that the majority of acts of violent victimization reported for all women in Canada—that's physical assault, sexual assault or robbery—were committed against a woman with a disability? That's census data from 2014, the most recent census data. The highest rate of violent victimization is committed against women with disabilities in this country. How many of you know that the majority of human rights complaints in this country are disability-related? Make it your business.

You are contemplating Bill C-81 in Parliament, an accessibility act for Canada. It's not a law about disability. It is an act for all rights holders in Canada. If you are an indigenous woman with a disability, or an immigrant or refugee woman with a disability, or you are black, live in a remote region or are transgendered, then it is your right to live free from violence and to have access to housing, to employment and to your dignity. We must understand that when we are looking at any of these issues, including access to transition houses and shelters, we must think from an intersectional perspective about where this woman lives—if she lives in the north, if she is indigenous, if she has a disability. All these things must be considered and they must be prioritized.

Shelters and transition houses are a vitally important part of the solution for millions of women and girls with disabilities who need a safe place to be, and for all women and girls in this country. We are falling short of the existing needs, but solutions have to go beyond bricks and mortar and beds, as I said when I began. What about childhood sexual and physical abuse? So many of the women who end up on the streets were once young girls whose trust and spirits were broken long before they found their way to their first shelter. What about trauma-informed counselling, screening for brain injury, and then providing the necessary supports for a full recovery? We don't do that. Why?

This study is important, but let's not oversimplify something that requires a cultural shift. It's time.

Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much, Bonnie.

We'll move over to Arlene Hache for seven minutes.

You have the floor.

Ms. Arlene Hache (Community Advocate, As an Individual):
Good afternoon.

You can't imagine how thankful and honoured I am to be here, primarily because, as Bonnie was saying, I experienced childhood and youth violence and abuse. I was a runaway and was homeless. I hitchhiked up to the Northwest Territories, and because the regular sheltering system couldn't respond to my needs and my behaviour, I ended up establishing a shelter for women who are homeless, which I ran for 30 years.

Based on my activism and my work in that field, I received the Order of Canada in 2009, and in 2012, I received Queen Elizabeth's Diamond Jubilee Medal. I raise that because it was an incredibly surreal experience knowing that I went from sleeping and hiding in bushes to that event. It felt kind of weird, similar to how I feel here. I hope that what I have to say actually matters and makes a difference because that's what I try to do.

I thought I would begin by talking about the recommendations that I have in case I don't get to those. I have been accused of not having solutions and looking toward the problem.

I have three recommendations. One is that Women's Shelters Canada, which purports to be the voice of women accessing sheltering services and transitional housing services in Canada, remove exclusionary criteria that prohibits their membership from including women-run shelters for women who are homeless. I'll get more into why they have that criteria that doesn't include us because we're homeless women.

The other recommendation that I have is that Women's Shelters Canada and their member agencies across the country change their approach from a sort of continuum of services that requires huge engagement from participants.... Actually, they're renters. People who pay rent have to sign up to participate in programs, whether they're good or not, whether they like them or not. I want Women's Shelters Canada to take a human rights approach to housing, like what you find in the housing first program.

The other things I'm hoping to do are to apply a human rights model to sheltering and transitional housing services for women, support the development of a gender-specific housing-first model, and provide tenants in transitional housing.... In our territory, they pay up to \$1,700 a month for rent, and they're not afforded the same protections as any other tenant. That's true across the country. The message out there is that all of these people have problems and we're taking care of those problems, so they don't need protection from us. We need protection from them.

I'm here to tell you that's actually not true. Ontario declared women living in transitional housing as one of the most vulnerable groups of people. Again, I'll try to describe what those are.

Finally, I am recommending that the system develop and implement a culturally sound competency-based staff training curriculum specific to the needs of first nations, Inuit and Métis women, involving women with lived experience of homelessness.

Those are my three recommendations, and I'll move to why I'm asking for those things.

I'm asking for those things because not only am I a woman with lived experience, but I also ran a shelter for 25 years in the north. The Centre for Northern Families was established kind of by accident or by default because the other service provider who had this continuum of service model kicked a woman out because she had a disability. They said that she posed a danger to herself and other people. She was wandering on the street and in trouble, and she came to our resource centre and said, "I've no place to go." We took her in. Was she a risk to herself? Yeah, she was a risk to herself, but the risk to herself was greater on the street at 40-below, unprotected and vulnerable.

The woman slept on the couch in the centre, and over time many other women came who couldn't access the sheltering and transitional housing services run by, again, this mainstream service that deliberately opted not to follow a human rights model. The women were primarily first nations, Inuit and Métis, and they were struggling with the intergenerational impacts of colonization, racism, the effects of residential schools and the foster care system, and ongoing community and family violence.

• (1540)

We were sort of mentors to each other because we were very similar. Having said that, I position myself as a settler and as not experiencing the same level of racism and discrimination as indigenous women or women of colour. I want to make that clear.

Their needs were complex, and they used substances to cope. We took a really different approach, mostly because I was more of a peer than a worker, and, thank, God, they didn't train the humanity out of me.

We also had a resource centre that was rooted already in principles of inclusion, tolerance and peaceful co-existence, where individuals were valued no matter what, and where people were respected and supported to achieve self-determination. That was the statement of our principles, so that's how we operated. It just made a different environment—an inclusive environment—and we ended up with all the people that the community and service providers considered problem people.

The women stayed on their own during the evening. All the staff were around, but those women took care of themselves. They stayed on their own. They did really well, because they also had great qualities. They're very caring. They have a real spiritual connection. They knew they had responsibilities, so they stayed on their own.

We met with them during the day, and we resolved conflicts through kind of a circle process, which is common in indigenous communities. When the women were not able to act in a respectful

way, they were required to leave the premises for very short periods of time. They were never banned, never punished, and they were always able to come back once they could again have some composure.

This low-barrier housing option became in such demand that the Government of Northwest Territories funded the program and gave us a big building. It was funded for 16 beds, but 30 women lived there. Nobody else would serve a lot of the women who lived there, including the hospital, the correctional system, the other shelters, the medical community, counselling and community care. Nobody would go near these women except for us, because we love them actually.

• (1545)

The Chair: Arlene, we've gone a little over time.

Ms. Arlene Hache: Oh, sorry.

The Chair: I know you have so much more to share, but we'll be doing our seven minutes of questioning.

We're going to start off with Emmanuella.

You have seven minutes.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): I'd like to give you a chance to finish, if you have more you would like to share with us.

Ms. Arlene Hache: Can I? It won't take me long I don't believe.

Let me just say that aside from barriers of racism, discrimination and stigmatization that were largely perpetrated by the sisterhood or by feminist women, it became really challenging to address, because everyone sort of treated those service providers as mom and apple pie.

You hear across Canada, and certainly in the north, that the government is always saying, "These people take care of all the problem people, so let's not be too hard on them and let's not have too high of expectations." Even across Canada today, there are no standards for shelter services. One of the guys got kicked out of his shelter for not participating in the program when he didn't have addictions. I'll leave that one alone for the moment.

Let me just talk about two things. One is that, in the Northwest Territories recently, a study was done on women living in violence. The study was done, but not by interviewing women or children who were experiencing violence. They interviewed 100% service providers, and nobody who actually had the experience. Of those people, they interviewed 86% non-indigenous people, when 99% of the people in the shelter were indigenous.

With the people they did interview, of the 86%, the majority of those people were new to the north. They didn't even really know where they were and what was going on. They would never have the capacity to understand the northern situation. Now that report is being put out there like it is the solution.

Their solution is to have more money for sheltering services. We're saying that it's permanent housing. We had a fire in Yellowknife that destroyed a transitional house. There were 33 families on the street. All of those families were rehoused by the next day in private market housing. I'm sitting here asking why they weren't in private market housing in the first place.

I find that the lobbying efforts really.... It's not that shelters aren't important, because I ran one. I probably needed the support and couldn't really function in one before that. I'm just saying that we tend to keep women in those housing options forever, and we let the private market housing off the hook.

There are three women I would really like to talk about, but that will take too long, so I'll just leave it.

However, if anyone else wants to talk about those three women and the exemplification of their experience—to hear what I'm saying—that would be great.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much.

You said there are restrictions and that certain people are excluded from shelters. Can you give us more details as to which types of women they are and some characteristics. Who are the different types of women who are excluded from these shelters?

Ms. Arlene Hache: There are a lot of reasons why women are excluded. In my experience in the north it's primarily racism and discrimination.

I had a first nations woman who went to the family violence shelter to get an emergency protection order. She wasn't even allowed through the door. They talked to her from the door and said that she couldn't get the emergency protection order because her abuse wasn't serious enough or sustained enough. The very next day her non-indigenous partner went to get an EPO at the same shelter, and he got the EPO. Then she was separated from her five children for the next five years. She's still trying to get that done.

Women with alcohol, even if they smell of alcohol, are not allowed in the shelter. Women who go out three times in a row and don't report back are booted out of the shelter. There are a ton of rules that prevent, especially indigenous women, from accessing or staying in the shelter.

One of the Inuk women lived in transition housing for eight years. She said when she moved out into subsidized housing it was like she got a pass out of jail, after eight years. She felt like she had been incarcerated.

● (1550)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much.

Ms. Brayton, you spoke about the lack of beds. I'd like to know what you would recommend the government to do to help with that lack of beds, so that more of these women are serviced?

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: I think one of the things that we do understand is that there is a shortage of beds. Certainly accessible beds and accessible shelters is a huge issue. The complexity for that of course is that a lot of transition houses and shelters are in old buildings.

One of the things that DAWN Canada has thought for a long time would be an interesting approach to take around some of those kinds of issues is to use the enabling accessibility fund directed and coordinated with.... Again, it would be a call for proposals that would line up, for example, with something from Status of Women Canada focused on specific populations.

One of the things that we have seen, for example, is that some funding that gets transferred through provincial funding, which is intended for accessibility, gets used for infrastructure. It's unfortunate, and it's not what I want to see. I think what it speaks to is more than just that the shelters don't care about women with disabilities. It's that there are huge infrastructure and funding issues that they are dealing with on top of the fact that they have a shortage of beds.

In terms of what I think needs to be thought through, it's that for a lot of women a transition house or a shelter isn't the only solution. We need to think a lot more about outreach programs, about programs that support a woman in place, understanding that transportation is an enormous issue, and that for some women the idea of leaving family is simply not an option because of cultural differences and all kinds of practical reasons.

I do think that we need to address the beds issue. I don't think that there's any question that it requires resources and funding for infrastructure, and a coordinated infrastructure that allows for thinking through full accessibility and inclusion, in terms of the approach.

What it really requires is a commitment to providing services and supports to women who are fleeing violence, writ large, as something that has to be a priority in all communities and not leaving it to the idea of just shelters and transition houses, and how many of these can we build. We need to think about prevention and starting to teach children human rights in kindergarten.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Can you speak a bit more to what you think would benefit women who have disabilities and what specific types of services they would benefit from?

The Chair: Please give a very short answer, we're over time.

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: Again, DAWN is cross-disability and I put a lot of emphasis in my presentation on brain-injured women. One of the things that I emphasized in my presentation is how important it will be to develop screening at the front end in terms of front-line services, so that if a woman has a brain injury she gets properly screened for it. That's not happening right now.

The Chair: Excellent, thank you very much.

We're now going to move over to Rachael Harder for her seven minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you to both of you for being here. I really appreciate your time and the expertise that you're able to contribute to the conversation here today.

My first question is going to be directed to Bonnie.

I'm just wondering if you can comment a little further with regard to women who function with a disability and overall access to housing and giving them access to move along the continuum.

I know you're wanting to draw our attention to other programs, and I can appreciate that. This study is quite finite in that it is focused on shelters. We can take note of the other things that you are saying here today anecdotally, but unfortunately they won't make it into the report because of the focus.

I would ask you to comment specifically on the continuum, which is moving from a shelter into perhaps the rental market and then into home ownership, if possible. What does that look like for a woman who functions with a disability? Is that readily available to her? Is that moving along the continuum feasible? What are the challenges or barriers that are in place that would prevent a woman from being able to do that? How can we help?

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: I appreciate the question very much and understand that the focus is on shelters and transition houses. I have to say again, that's not a solution for everybody and it's important to understand that it's not going to work across the country to say we're going to focus on beds.

With due respect, I hear you. I just wanted to say that.

In terms of women with disabilities, we're talking about women with the highest rates of poverty and unemployment as well. If it's a physical disability, she's very likely, depending on her situation, dealing with those issues as well. In terms of a woman with a brain injury, like I said, she doesn't necessarily have a diagnosis. She doesn't know she has a brain injury, so she's in a cycle of self-blaming. She may end up with a mental health issue, with alcohol and addictions issues, and some of the same things you've heard about already in terms of the challenges with access to transition houses and shelters.

To put a fine point on it, in terms of the accessibility issue for transition houses and shelters, it's not good. Significant resources need to be put into.... Again, the enabling accessibility fund is one example I cited, simply because it is focused on the built environment and specifically addressing accessibility issues.

It's important to understand that it's about social and economic inclusion. Those are two really key pieces. Putting a woman with a disability into a shelter on the first floor where she's alone, and everybody else is doing activities on the second floor, is another way that social isolation builds up. DAWN Canada has put a great deal of emphasis on the urgent need for peer support and peer support models at the community level, including in transition houses, shelters and women-serving organizations.

I would hesitate to say that there's a home ownership piece at the end of this for most women with disabilities, given that the unemployment rate of women with disabilities in this country is up to 75%.

• (1555)

Ms. Rachael Harder: Okay. Thank you.

Even that is helpful for us to understand at this committee, and for that data to make its way into the report is very helpful. Thank you, I appreciate that.

Arlene, my next question for you is along the same lines. You come from a unique context, and that is the north. I would be interested in hearing what that unique context is like, specifically to do with housing availability.

I had the opportunity to go to Nunavut in March and look at housing there and its availability, and the repercussions of the fact that very little housing is available. You have multiple generations living together under one roof, sometimes 15 people in one house with three bedrooms. There are health implications for this type of living situation: physical health implications, mental health implications, emotional health implications, etc.

I'd be curious for you to paint a picture with regard to your context.

Ms. Arlene Hache: You've sort of painted the impact of it, but let me just say this. Not only is there no housing, all of the housing—all of it—is controlled by the government. They have a sort of across-the-board policy. If you owe 10 cents to the housing corporation, you will never get housing in the Northwest Territories. You're not eligible for any housing.

I don't know if you are all aware that it was a woman in a small community in Northwest Territories who won the first United Nations judgment against Canada under CEDAW for the theft of her house—the illegal theft of her house by the government, colluding with her partner.

The fact that there is no optional housing creates a huge barrier. We're really looking at small homes, those small home options, and home ownership for women in the communities. Some disabled women have taken on home ownership responsibilities with supported living and that sort of thing.

We believe there are solutions. If we can go to more of a co-op model, we think women will survive it better.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Sorry, can you expand that briefly? What do you mean by a co-op model?

Ms. Arlene Hache: It's like rent to own, where the women own the housing in the end. I just don't want to say how horrific it is that we have all these families living together, but the violence is through the roof in part because of that. If we don't address it, that will be a huge challenge. As you know, the government is giving only a very minimal amount that will never catch up to the homelessness challenges in the north.

They have those freight things. We're looking at the freight things and unique alternatives for that.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Yes. That's really fascinating.

My last question here is, very briefly, when you say a "co-op model", are you familiar with social bonds?

• (1600)

Ms. Arlene Hache: No.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Okay. Would there be reason to bring private enterprise into the mix to partner with government in order to provide affordable housing in a co-op model?

Ms. Arlene Hache: As long as the government doesn't control it. We want women to control their own housing.

Can that happen in the north? I talked to the minister of housing. They said that in the north nobody has the capacity. That really denigrates the skills of women in the north. We have mentors who are willing to do that. As long as the partnership is broader than the government, the sky is the limit.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Thank you very much for adding that.

We're now going to carry on with Brigitte Sansoucy for seven minutes.

You have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for your testimony.

Ms. Brayton, this past April, the UN special rapporteur on violence against women came to conduct an investigation in Canada. She said in her report that assistance, home support services and adapted transportation lacked accessibility for women with disabilities.

Do you think the federal government has complied with the UN special rapporteur's recommendation since she completed her mission to Canada? Has any progress been made on implementing international human rights standards here in Canada?

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: Thank you, Ms. Sansoucy.

We were very pleased to attend a bilateral meeting with the UN special rapporteur while she was in Montreal. We submitted a five-page document to her outlining our concerns and were very pleased to see she had included some of our recommendations in her remarks before she left in June.

As for the progress that has been made since our meeting, I would say that Bill C-81 shows that the federal government intends to make Canada a country that respects everyone's rights. Bill C-81 is a first step in that direction. We've seen the special rapporteur's remarks and those of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which were submitted in the spring of 2016. In them, the committee made 21 special references to the situation of women and girls with disabilities in Canada. In another presentation, CIDA also raised concerns about the situation of those women and girls. The Economic and Social Council, ECOSOC, did so as well. In other words, three UN agencies have raised concerns over the situation of women and girls with disabilities in Canada.

As we now see, some situations have been going on for a long time, and that's important. It's unacceptable for Canada to view women and girls with disabilities as a small cohort. We must address this situation and give serious consideration, in the context of this

bill, to the possibility of genuinely becoming a country that stands for all women and girls.

Thank you very much for raising the issue of the UN, where we mainly work for women and girls with disabilities and those who are deaf.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you. I'd like to point out that you are a member of Minister Monsef's advisory council on Canada's strategy to prevent and address gender-based violence. The campaign was more than a footnote during National Accessibility Week.

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: Yes.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Do you think Canada's strategy to prevent and address gender-based violence or existing federal programs meet the specific needs of women with disabilities, and do they ensure that those women have access to services comparable to those provided to women in general?

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: We aren't there yet, madam.

I sat on Minister Monsef's committee, and I honestly saw that we had made some progress.

Last spring, we issued a call for tenders for projects involving women and girls with disabilities. We now have recognition at the federal level. A feminist policy must include everyone. Sometimes we've had to remind the various federal departments that this also included women and girls with disabilities.

The big Women Deliver conference will be held in Vancouver next spring, and I'm afraid we can't attend. A great deal of work remains to be done to bring about a policy change.

You said something about a footnote. DAWN Canada examined the statutes and policies of the governments of British Columbia, Quebec and Ontario over three years. Unfortunately, we saw that, at the federal level, women and girls with disabilities often wind up as a footnote or are not gendered.

This shows that, when it comes to disabilities, people are still inclined to lump women and girls in with men rather than design policies specifically for women and girls and include us in them. We understand why there are historic trends in individual rights concerns.

This is why I remind everyone how important it is to look at this act and campaign from an intersectional perspective. By adopting that perspective, we will include all women and girls, whether they have disabilities or are racialized or indigenous.

● (1605)

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: In 2011, you prepared a report in which you said that women no longer wanted to be consulted and that they wanted concrete measures.

You talked to us about your upcoming brief. What concrete measures should we take right now?

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: You should start by reviewing the policies of the federal departments. I don't want to hear any more about GBA plus. We're included in the "plus", and that's really insulting for us; we aren't a "plus".

Comparative gender analysis isn't enough. In Canada, that analysis is based on rights holders, but it's time to change this way of doing things by adopting an intersectoral perspective. Compartments have been created to address certain issues, but now that we know who the most marginalized people in Canada are, it's time to exit those compartments and adopt an intersectoral perspective.

[English]

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

We're now going to move over to Sonia Sidhu for seven minutes.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, both, for being here and for your testimony.

Arlene, you mentioned a gender-specific, housing first model. What would it look like? Do you think staff should be trained in a specific way?

Ms. Arlene Hache: I'm not sure yet because the housing first model is based on principles that work. First of all, it's immediate access to housing, not waiting. It's consumer choice and self-determination. It's recovery-oriented and deals with trauma responses. It's individualized support, and it also supports community integration.

For me, the housing first model has all of the elements it needs. I think it's the application of cultural differences or cultural tools, trauma-informed practice, and it's just to round out the practice better. It's frustrating because the housing model, from an old survivor of the shelter, works. Women's groups are saying it doesn't work and they have their own way of doing things and they have to support all these women. They act like women in shelters have no capacity at all to live on their own or to continue their own lives. A lot of women who face violent situations have lived on their own, can live on their own. Just because they end up in a shelter doesn't mean that they can't be supported in their own home or different homes.

What do I mean by a housing first model? I don't think anyone has answered that question. I think there are polarized views. I think there's a group of people who think housing first and nothing else, and there's a group that says women need to be supported and that's not the housing first model. I think they're biased and not really looking at it in an objective way.

• (1610)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

Bonnie, you mentioned a human rights model. Do you think that model can be for both a rural and urban area? Because—

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: I'm from the north—the near north, not the far north. It's different depending on where you are in Canada. It very much depends on what type of community you have and what kinds of resources you have to start with. In so many cases—and you heard what Arlene said, that she started a shelter—an awful lot of what happens in terms of community need is driven by somebody in a community starting something, beginning with something.

I don't think there's a cookie-cutter approach to this. I know we all wish that would be the case. I also think that we have to take a much

more horizontal approach. The federal, provincial and municipal governments need to work together on these situations. It's really clear to me that we can't do a top-down model, that the horizontal approach is the only one that's really going to get us at something—transfer payments—because municipalities are dealing with it in the face.

I met Hazel McCallion, from Mississauga, and was involved with her in a project in 2014. Hazel talked about what she was living as the mayor of Mississauga in terms of dealing with this. As I said, it's really important to talk to people who are mayors of cities and small towns and to understand that they're at the front line in terms of where that's happening, along with those shelters and transition houses and the resources. The provincial governments, which are receiving those transfer payments from the government and are making those decisions themselves, are dealing with the same kinds of challenges in terms of the remote and rural communities versus the larger urban centres where again, population bases, voting bases, all of these things are at play. We can't pretend they're not.

It's very important to understand that we have to start trying to put the women first and figure out how we do that from a more horizontal approach. I think some of the discussions that are now happening between federal and provincial governments are exciting, but not bringing the municipal governments in is a mistake. I do think this is the kind of thing that needs to be.... You start with the study, and then you start to pull in people who are actually working on these issues and start to get some of the best practices and look at them, because there are good practices out there in communities big and small. There's lots of innovation going on out there.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Last Friday I visited the Journey Neighbourhood Centre, where they give education. You mentioned the screening of brain injuries. How can we raise awareness for that? Until today, I did not know about that.

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: Dr. Colantonio, in some of the work she's done, has included looking at a model that comes out of the U.S. that was developed a number of years ago. There are three or four screening questions that can be discreetly included in an intake. It's the kind of thing where if you answer “yes” to the first three questions, then there's the drill-down. If you don't, then it gets set aside.

Thinking about how you screen people when they come into a transition house or a shelter is important to our understanding much better over a period of, say, five years, what those needs are. If we started with some of the high-level issues being identified, then started doing some screening and questions and looking at that data to analyze it.... You have to have data and you have to be able to measure it to figure out what the solutions are. I think that's one of the other things we need to do.

You guys are going to hear a lot from different people. You can take note of what those big issues are and then start to work with the networks that are out there and start collecting data so we can get to real responses and some of the good practices out there.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: What unique challenges do special needs women face living in the shelters? For example, do they provide sign language for the deaf?

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: I'm so glad you brought that up, because I was going to say deaf women.... Talk about being underserved. Again, it's their right. There's a human right involved that is not being respected, the right to access to sign language, both ASL and LSQ, the two official sign languages of people with disabilities in this country.

I would add that there is also indigenous sign language. I don't think we're going to go anywhere near that today, but it's important to understand that without that, you are literally withholding the most basic right somebody has, which is the ability to communicate.

In terms of that being an issue to identify as a priority area, I thank you for bringing it up, because it certainly will be reflected in our report. We have huge concern for the fact that there's really.... In terms of the provincial level, we've tested some of the provincial hotlines, and if a deaf woman or a woman with a disability calls, often they don't know what to do or where to refer her. Sometimes they refer them to us. DAWN's not a direct service, but we get some of those calls.

• (1615)

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you so much.

We'll now carry on to our second round of questioning.

Ms. Harder, you have five minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I am sharing my time with my colleague Ms. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I do appreciate the opportunity to be here and to ask one question. I am not a permanent member on this committee, but I did have the opportunity to travel with a status of women committee back in 2008 in order to do a study very similar to this one. We travelled to Nunavut, New Brunswick, Labrador and northern Quebec.

The question I have for you is around this. Perhaps one of the most recent examples I have of organizations coming together to address the needs of their community comes from the homelessness partnering strategy and, more closer to home, the community boards that were established. In Saskatoon it was SHIP, the Saskatoon housing initiatives partnership. All manner of organizations that were looking at addressing the housing needs of the residents in that community got together to identify the priorities and needs within their own community.

It seemed like a pretty good model to have the communities themselves identify, perhaps up to the federal government, where those dollars needed to be spent. They actually chose the organizations that would receive the funding that came from the federal government.

I'm wondering if you think there's any sort of value in a model like that to address the needs we're discussing today.

Ms. Arlene Hache: Could I address that for a sec?

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: Go ahead.

Ms. Arlene Hache: Yellowknife was touted as the best place almost in Canada for that model. When the HPS first started, we were told that everybody, including indigenous governments, had to be at the table or we weren't getting any funding. We all came to the table because we all wanted funding. We all got along. We all developed a really thorough plan. It was a collaboration. On and on it went.

All of a sudden, the federal government decided to change the whole thing and make it city hubs. Now the city controls it. There's a hub. They disbanded the community committee. It became a very bureaucratic, non-inclusive, silencing kind of body where they decide who gets the money.

So it did work, I think famously, and if they had maintained that concept and that model, I think it would have worked across Canada. They changed the structure, and I think it doesn't work that well. We have to really keep in mind that the voice of people with lived experience is excluded by service providers, by government, by decision-makers. They're all talking to their navels. They have no idea how to move from homelessness to contribution to greatness.

I think many people can do that. I did that, and not because I was punished and put down and pathologized. I did that because my sort of behaviour was normalized as somebody suffering from trauma and other things, and once I dealt with that, I could move forward, which I did. I think the system tends to pathologize. Women themselves tend to dig themselves out and move on, if we can just get everybody else to move out of the way.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you.

I'm sharing my time, so I'll turn it back over to my colleague.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

Thank you for your response. I think that's really helpful for us.

I'd be interested to know how you started your centre and who came there. Who needed what you had to offer?

Ms. Arlene Hache: It was very interesting. I was on the street, so I was running around like a crazy person along with lots of other people. We started the centre because we couldn't function all that well. I could at least read, so when my colleagues on the street would run into child welfare or welfare or police, I would step up and say, "Well, I can read. Let me read that." I began to be an activist. The system really balked against that: "We get along up here. We get along. Why are you here? What are you talking about? These women don't need you."

I think that's how it started. The Centre for Northern Families became known across the north as an activist and advocate centre, but we always got pushed back by “don't bite the hand that feeds you”, or “don't doubt the sisterhood”, etc. At the end of the day, however, our centre was successful because we were trusted. Community people trust us.

What else can I say about it except that trust is huge? Compassion is huge. I loved those women and they knew it. We were peers. We were peers working together. That made the difference in terms of understanding and....

Oops. I'd better watch the chair more carefully.

• (1620)

The Chair: It's all good.

We'll move on to our final five minutes.

Ms. Nassif.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you both for your presentations.

Welcome, Ms. Brayton. The last time we saw each other was in Montreal last summer.

You talked about these women who suffer from blows to the head, who may have been strangled or struck on several occasions, who are traumatized and who may also suffer brain injuries.

Could you tell us a little more about the problems these disabled women experience with their children?

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: The issue of women who have suffered brain trauma is really a very special one. As I mentioned earlier, it's often not diagnosed. These women live with it without realizing they have it. As a result of their behaviour, they can definitely be perceived in a shelter as troublemakers, as individuals with behavioural problems, who don't want to obey the rules and so on.

So these women will blame themselves. They feel it's all due to their attitude, that it's their fault. In addition, women who experience violence often have self-esteem problems. Consequently, it's not surprising that women who already have this problem and suffer brain trauma, particularly when it affects their executive functions, also suffer from a lack of judgment and all kinds of behavioural problems associated with their disability. This happens without them or people around them realizing it. As I mentioned, they often have mental health and drug and alcohol dependency problems, for example. These individuals are victims of violence, women with disabilities they're unaware of.

I have some statistics. For example, a study by Dr. Angela Colantonio states that 40% of women in prison in Ontario have three things in common, not including racism, which is another problem. Her study focused on three things they have in common.

[*English*]

They have three things in common. They have a history of childhood sexual abuse, a brain injury and they're in prison. In Ontario 40% of women have those three things in common.

[*Translation*]

So we're criminalizing victims. It's mainly that.

There's also something that's related to the health and social fields. We're beginning to learn more about this. We talk about football players, athletes and all kinds of people, but a woman exposed to violence experiences the same thing. The only difference is that she isn't a star. She gets punched, and she's just a woman who has violence in her life.

There's an enormous number of these women. The exact percentage is still unknown, but an estimated 30% to 80% of women living in shelters have suffered brain trauma. I'm not exaggerating. Women and people who work in shelters will confirm that for you. People used to say something was wrong, but it was never named. Now we're starting to name it.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Apart from the bed shortage and the difficulty involved in accessing those shelters and halfway houses, you mentioned a lack—

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: They wind up homeless and sexually exploited. They're human-trafficking victims. The disability rate among women in this situation is enormous. Nearly half of them have a disability.

• (1625)

[*English*]

Take the missing and murdered women inquiry and the indigenous women we're talking about in that community. Many of those women had traumatic brain injuries. They didn't have the diagnosis, but they had the traumatic brain injury. As I said, it's outside of this study, but it's very important to understand that these women are not making it into those transition houses and shelters for those same reasons.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Can you tell us whether there are any shelters or halfway houses where staff can establish a diagnosis before starting to house and stigmatize these women?

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: No, there aren't any.

I didn't say a lot about accessibility. That'll be in our official presentation. There's no such thing as physical accessibility or anything related to it.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Not anywhere in Canada?

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: No.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: We're going provide every group with one extra question. Keep it short and simple. We're going to go to Brigitte Sansoucy, Rachael Harder, and whomever you would like—just tell me who it's going to be.

Brigitte, you have time for a short question.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: I'd like to continue on the issue of accessibility.

What more can we do to improve it?

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: As I said, there are four pillars. The first is research, and the second is education.

An enormous amount of education has to be done in the shelters concerning policies for establishing programs for accessibility and support for shelters and halfway houses. Politically speaking, people like you have to be informed about who our current clientele is, who isn't and why. It's obviously very important to assess accessibility funding so we can ensure it's there.

To be able to say that a shelter is ready to admit women with disabilities, you don't just install a ramp and that's it. You really have to rethink the concept of admitting women with disabilities.

Some thought has to be given to hiring employees and establishing a board of directors.

You have to know how to set up a shelter so it's a welcoming place for anyone in any situation.

[*English*]

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

A short question means a short answer, but Bonnie, you have so much to offer. Thank you.

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: I do my best, Karen.

The Chair: You are awesome. Thank you.

Rachael, you have a short question—for a short answer.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Arlene, I just wanted to follow up on what you were saying with regard to the shelter you ran. Where did the funding come from for that? How did that take place?

Ms. Arlene Hache: I volunteered for the first four years because we couldn't get funding. Eventually, we embarrassed the GNWT into funding something, and it just worked. We had so many people coming to the shelter, and the family resource centre was attached. We had 50 people. Professional people always tried to get us to change what we were doing, and then people would drop off. I would say, "Well, no, we're here to help people."

The focus on people versus programs was huge. Funding came because it worked, and it still comes. I work with indigenous women on employment and stuff. We're just on a huge roll.

The Chair: Fantastic.

We're going to finish off with our final question from Darren Fisher. You have a short time. Go for it.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you so much for being here.

I'm not on the committee, but I'm fascinated by this topic.

I have a short snapper on funding and the gap. Which provinces do well and which provinces don't do well? Is there a way to correlate or publish that so we can see, on a per capita basis perhaps?

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: I don't know the provincial data, but I can tell you without question that the Atlantic region needs much more in the way of resources. A lower populations means they just don't get the right slice of the pie. The north, for sure.... We've been talking a lot about the north, and the north is so important.

Mr. Darren Fisher: The populated provinces do better.

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: Yes, they do, no question.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you so much.

This has been a great panel. I would really like to thank Bonnie Brayton and Arlene Hache for coming and filling us in. We're going to take a short break and finish up with our next panel.

We're suspended for about two minutes.

● (1625)

(Pause)

● (1630)

The Chair: We're about to reconvene for the second half of today's panel. We're continuing with our study on the system of shelters and transition houses serving women and children affected by violence against women and intimate partner violence.

On our second panel I am very happy to welcome Martina Jileckova and Lisa Litz from Horizon Housing Society. We also have, from the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, Jeff Morrison, executive director, and Dominika Krzeminska, who is the director of programs and strategic initiatives.

We're going to begin with seven minutes. We're going to begin with Martina. You have the floor.

Ms. Martina Jileckova (Chief Executive Officer, Horizon Housing Society): Thank you very much.

Good afternoon everybody, and thank you for the opportunity to participate in this important conversation.

My name is Martina Jileckova, and I am here today in my capacity as CEO of Horizon Housing Society. We are an affordable housing charity in Calgary. We provide affordable, supportive housing for vulnerable families, individuals and seniors with special needs, including those who are fleeing family violence. I'm here today with Lisa Litz, who is the director of stakeholder relations.

I want to say at the outset that while I have more than 20 years of experience developing and managing affordable housing for vulnerable populations, I am by no means an expert on domestic violence alone. My remarks today will focus largely on the part of the equation that we know the most about in our organization, which is affordable housing with supports.

To prepare for today's conversation, we reached out to Calgary's leading providers of services for survivors of family violence, including the smart and caring teams of YWCA Calgary, Discovery House, Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter and others. I would like to acknowledge them and thank them for the insights that they shared.

I'd like to turn this over to Lisa to continue with our remarks.

•(1635)

Ms. Lisa Litz (Director of Stakeholder Relations, Horizon Housing Society): Two consistent themes emerged from our consultations, and I think the first was that we really can't hope to address demand in shelter beds if we don't first start to have a bit of a conversation about prevention and long-term solutions. That rang through loud and clear.

I would say the second piece was that affordable supportive housing, ideally in community, is probably a very important part of that solution.

What we heard over and over again is that preventing family violence is a powerful upstream mechanism. It's a way of decreasing the demand, but it is a longer-term solution. I have to say, as Martina said, we are not experts on this topic. There are other folks with deeper expertise who can talk to you about prevention. What we can tell you is that we absolutely believe we need to focus on reducing demand, because the number of women seeking help is just heartbreaking and it really demands our action.

In Calgary, which is a city of about 1.2 million, more than 800 women and children are turned away from secondary shelters every year due to lack of space. Across our province, that number climbs to 22,000, and that's according to statistics from the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. That number, 22,000, is more than double the women accommodated, so it demands our action.

Worrying as well is that we know that these numbers are too low. As many of you on the panel will understand, we know that women's homelessness tends to be hidden. We know that women will often resort to couch surfing, to staying with an abusive partner and to trading sex for shelter in order to remain off the streets and to keep their children housed.

How do we address the lack of space? I think in the long term we do it by reducing the demand by addressing family violence. In the much nearer term, we believe we can free up shelter beds by investing in affordable housing with social supports, and I'll turn back to Martina to elaborate on that.

Ms. Martina Jileckova: Again, we are from Calgary, so take our city as an example. We know that we need to add more than 15,000 affordable rental housing just to meet the average in other large cities. That's how much we are behind the rest of Canada.

The lack of access to supported affordable housing is, for women fleeing violence, double-barrelled. Women leaving a violent partner often face a reduction in income, and we see that when they come to stay with us. Then, the lack of access to affordable housing can force them into homelessness. Once they are there, the lack of housing options keeps them in homelessness.

Our partners, Discovery House and others, tell us that the average second-stage shelter stay for a woman and her children is nine months in Calgary. It's not necessarily because they need to be in the shelter for nine months but because there is a lack of affordable housing for these women to move into.

Increasing the stock of affordable supported housing can help keep some women out of shelters in the first place. For those who enter the shelter system, an increase in affordable supportive housing

means that the option to leave the shelter comes to them sooner, and they are still able to retain the social supports to address the trauma.

I want to, again, draw on the example of the community housing program at Discovery House. Discovery House is a Calgary-based domestic violence charity and is one of our partner agencies. This program quickly diverts families from shelters into affordable housing with supports in the community. In doing so, funds are freed to increase counselling and other supports that are needed by the women. They are provided for women and their children and thereby increase their rate of success.

Before I close my remarks, I want to draw your attention to women to whom we must pay urgent attention, and those are indigenous women. We know that indigenous women are disproportionately affected by domestic violence, and they're over-represented in shelters. Again, drawing on the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters' data, in 2015-16, indigenous women were 60% of those admitted to shelters, yet they make up only 6% of Albertans, children and adults.

This statistic is shocking and demands immediate and purposeful action. In our journey of truth and reconciliation, we must act. We must prioritize our thinking and our resources to address this horrendous situation. A holistic approach that addresses these complex needs with culturally appropriate social supports, while providing affordable housing, offers us some of the most promising paths forward.

While continued support of shelters and shelter beds remains critical and more work on prevention is necessary, we encourage this committee to support community housing models that pair affordable, decent community housing with appropriate social supports.

We want to thank you for the invitation to address the committee and for all the work you do on this important topic.

•(1640)

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

We're going to pass it over to the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association.

Jeff Morrison, you have seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jeff Morrison (Executive Director, Canadian Housing and Renewal Association): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for this invitation to appear before you.

We are very pleased to be here with our colleagues from the Horizon Housing Society, and we are going to restate many of the points raised by Ms. Jileckova and Ms. Litz.

We are here today on behalf of the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, which represents the interests of the affordable and non-profit social housing sector in Canada.

[English]

Today we will be discussing a number of the problems facing housing for women and conclude with several key recommendations.

The first problem is clearly supply. With demand for social, supportive and non-profit housing increasingly outstripping supply, secure and affordable housing is often outside of the reach of low-income earners and vulnerable populations, including women fleeing violence. Years of underfunding has resulted in a lack of new supply to meet growing demand, and with an aging building stock, even the current stock of safe and affordable housing is at risk.

Why is this such a problem for women? Shelters and transitional housing are important, but they are and should be temporary. They are interim solutions for survivors of domestic violence. The next step for women is to find, secure and maintain safe and affordable housing. However, this gap between need and supply is exacerbated by long wait-lists for social and non-profit housing, particularly for families with children, which far outpaces the availability of units. As an example, in Montreal, there are currently over 25,000 individuals on the wait-list. In Toronto, the wait-list is well over 82,000. We anticipate that these numbers are very conservative. The real demand we believe is much, much higher.

[Translation]

Women who have experienced violence face unique housing needs and challenges. While housing is one of women's main concerns, the violence they suffer is one of the most significant causes of homelessness among Canadian families. In addition to the need to find adequate housing, victims of violence must deal with authorities responsible for child protection, welfare and the income supplement, family court and the justice system.

[English]

Women leaving violent situations require various long-term services and supports, particularly longer-term assistance in overcoming the emotional and psychological impact of domestic violence and social supports related to economic security and child care. The research is clear on the importance of providing critical resources for women in this post-separation period, with secure and stable housing as one of the most important of these critical resources.

I will now turn it over to my colleague, Ms. Krzeminska.

Ms. Dominika Krzeminska (Director, Programs and Strategic Initiatives, Canadian Housing and Renewal Association): Thank you.

Lack of communication and contradictions between various social support systems, such as social assistance, social housing and child welfare, may also prevent women from accessing and maintaining social housing. This, in addition to the long wait times for subsidized housing, result in shelters often needing to violate their policies or rules to extend women's stays at the shelter if housing is not yet made available to them.

This plays into the overcapacity and lack of available beds, thereby limiting the number of new women that shelters can accept. Unable to accommodate new residents due to overcapacity and resources, shelters must often turn away women and children.

There is no system in place to track these women to determine whether they have accessed safe housing. There is concern that women will either return to their domestic violence partners, head into invisible homelessness, enter street homelessness, or be forced by circumstance into other precarious situations, such as survival sex work or unsafe housing tenure.

There is a need to recognize that indigenous women are approximately 3.5 times more likely to experience some form of spousal violence than non-indigenous women. Indigenous women often migrate to urban centres to escape violence and poverty, often finding themselves in precarious housing situations either due to the lack of available housing options or systemic discrimination. Precarious housing not only increases indigenous women's risk of experiencing violence, it also contributes to the risk of being trafficked and the high number of missing and murdered indigenous women.

As was written by the Ontario Human Rights Commission in their "Right at home" report:

For Aboriginal women, who experience higher rates of violence compared to non-Aboriginal women, the situation is particularly bleak. The lack of adequate and affordable housing, financial assistance and social supports—coupled with other intersecting grounds—leaves many Aboriginal women with no choice but to return to their abusers.

I will pass it back to Jeff.

● (1645)

Mr. Jeff Morrison: In the midst of all this, we should of course point out that in November 2017 the federal government unveiled the 10-year, \$40-billion national housing strategy that includes a suite of policies and programs designed to support the existing social and affordable housing stock and increase the supply of affordable housing, including some specific measures for women and children.

Now, while these measures of course are a welcome step forward in reinvesting in Canada's social and affordable housing sector, there do remain several concerns, including the ability of the affordable housing sector to adequately increase necessary supply; the lack of an urban, rural and northern indigenous housing strategy; and the lack of measures to address the social supports that are still required, particularly for women and children, for social housing.

What do we recommend?

First, given the circumstances facing indigenous women as described by my colleague, we have called for the development and funding of an urban indigenous housing strategy. When the NHS was introduced in November 2017, it did commit to developing three distinctions-based indigenous housing strategies for the first nations, Métis and Inuit, and of course these are welcome. Although these strategies are welcome, they do not address the housing needs of the 87% of indigenous peoples, including women, living in urban, rural and northern settings.

The 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission report outlines calls to action and recommendations to address the harms perpetuated against indigenous people, particularly women. An urban, rural and northern indigenous housing strategy would build on the recommendations contained in the TRC report and assist in the overall reconciliation process.

[Translation]

Second, the national housing strategy should be expanded to establish new ways to increase the supply of safe and affordable housing. Several policy tools can be used for that purpose.

We presented various options—

[English]

The Chair: Excuse me for one moment. Could you slow it down just a bit for the interpreters? I don't know how close you are to the end, but we have about 30 seconds left.

Mr. Jeff Morrison: We're almost there.

[Translation]

We presented various options in our brief to the Standing Committee on Finance, and we would be pleased to discuss them today it

[English]

Third, the federal government must invest in the social supports that women fleeing violence require in combination with safe and affordable housing. As we've discussed, social supports and early intervention are key to helping women fleeing violence make a successful transition. Increasing the Canada social transfer with proper accountabilities, for example, would be one tool the federal government could use to achieve this.

Finally, Madam Chair, front-line staff and those women with lived experience absolutely need to be included in policy and program design and direction. Their voices need to be heard. Without question, women with lived experience can provide the strongest policy expertise in this area.

Thank you. We look forward to the conversation.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to start our seven-minute round with Marc Serré.

You have the floor, Marc.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for presenting the work they do in this field. Their recommendations will really help us in our study.

First, Mr. Morrison, I would ask you to send the clerk or the analyst the document you submitted to the Standing Committee on Finance.

Second, I would like to ask the two witnesses a question. We're discussing the national housing strategy that we've announced, and I'm going to question Mr. Morrison about the national aboriginal housing strategy advanced by his organization.

Before that, however, I would like to hear your recommendations on the partnerships that the federal government should establish and on the role the provinces and municipalities should play in that regard. This is the first time a national housing strategy has been advanced, and I would like you to tell us how we can work more closely with the provinces and municipalities.

• (1650)

Mr. Jeff Morrison: If you don't mind, I will answer in English.

[English]

It's absolutely essential that provincial strategies are aligned with the federal strategy, and that the federal strategy can provide tools for funding and for other purposes to the provinces and territories.

The municipalities are also key, especially when it comes to women fleeing violence because of, among the various reasons, the social supports provided by those municipalities. There is not a direct relationship per se, as there is with the provinces and territories, for example. However, we're hearing on an individual case—and I'll let Martina talk more about Calgary—a number of municipalities are starting to develop their own municipal housing strategies aligned with the federal, and in some cases, aligned with the province. That's the way it should be. There should be an alignment, a complementarity of strategies, particularly facing vulnerable groups such as women, where the need for social supports is just as important as the need for increasing supply.

I think Martina and Lisa can speak more about Calgary in that regard.

One of the key features of the national housing strategy is the very close relationship that it has with provincial and territorial governments. As you probably know, earlier this year, the federal government signed a multilateral agreement with all provinces and territories to implement essentially the key principles contained in the strategy. To date, three bilateral agreements have also been signed—with Ontario, British Columbia and New Brunswick—and we await the remaining bilateral agreements to be signed.

Ms. Martina Jileckova: Thank you.

I would echo Jeff's comments around the need to sign the bilateral agreements. Three have been signed. I come from Calgary, Alberta, and they are still working with the federal government on that agreement. We need to do whatever we can, both from the provincial side as well as from the federal side, to make sure that agreement gets signed.

The other piece I'd like to highlight is—again, Jeff is correct—there is less of a direct relationship between the federal government and the municipalities, but how we design the federal programs does then impact how well we can work together on the municipal level as well. An example would be the housing benefit. That hasn't rolled out in the national housing strategy, but as the policy is being developed at the federal level we must make sure it works with municipal and provincial programs.

Lastly, on the issue of working with municipalities. I come with the Alberta perspective so one point I want to make is that it's really important to consider regional differences. In Alberta we know that Calgary is a fairly significant landowner. Would there be a mechanism in the federal strategy? The national housing strategy speaks to the land transfer program. If there is not enough federal land in the federal strategy, could we still use the federal strategy to partner with a municipality and free up that land?

Why? You will hear me say it again: to have access to land is critical for us to be able to deliver new, affordable rental housing.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Serré: With respect to partnerships between the municipalities and the provinces, I would like—

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: With all due respect to my colleague, I find it hard to understand the connection between violence against women, which is the subject of our study, and his questions. I would like him to clarify that connection.

Mr. Marc Serré: Housing has to be created.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: I'd like to have a clear understanding of the connection with violence against women.

[English]

The Chair: Okay, thank you very much.

Brigitte, we discussed this the other day as well *en anglais*. But we're looking at the housing continuum also, and I don't want to put in any partisan things but we're talking about social, affordable shelters. We can start with shelters but we have to look at how the entire continuum is impacted, and if there are any gaps.

Although I recognize it may not be specific to shelters, we need to look at housing as an entire link, and whether we're looking at markets or whether we're looking at shelters, they are all part of the same package.

I will allow the continuation of these questions.

•(1655)

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Serré: I'd like to talk about statistics in the time I have left.

With respect to housing, we've talked about families and children. However, do you have any statistics on seniors and women? Do you have any housing-related data and recommendations on seniors?

Mr. Jeff Morrison: Our association has no specific recommendations on seniors.

[English]

With seniors, women fleeing violence, LGBT or veterans, for us, the link that we find that runs through all of this is the need for greater supply. As we said in our opening statement, shelters are a band-aid solution. They play a role, but they should not be seen as a permanent solution. For housing affecting seniors, as it is for women fleeing violence, the common thread is that we need greater supply and we need to use all those tools that impact that. If seniors benefit from that, then all the better.

Mr. Marc Serré: From an accessibility perspective, what recommendations do you think link back to the federal government for accessibility, when we look at shelters? It seems to be an issue for either the current housing stock, if we can call it that, and then new units.

Mr. Jeff Morrison: As you know, under the national housing strategy, the largest single program under that strategy is the national co-investment fund, which is the \$16-billion fund that invests in both repair and renewal of existing stock and building new stock. One of the requirements that the federal government has put on that co-investment fund is the need to meet accessibility standards. In other words, funding will not be provided unless units are demonstrated to meet accessibility standards. In that regard, I will say that it's caused some challenges for a number of housing providers to meet that standard, but if the requirement is maintained, then there will be some downstream effects, in terms of increasing the accessibility of both existing and new stock.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you.

We're now going to move over to Rachael Harder for seven minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Awesome. Thank you so much.

Thank you to each of you for taking the time to come here to be with us today. We really appreciate you offering your insights.

We'll start with the Horizon Housing Society. I have a few questions for you folks. You talked about the three themes that you saw come out. In that, you mentioned that affordable housing is certainly one of those things. Within affordable housing, there's a whole continuum of moving from shelters into perhaps transitional affordable housing within the rental market and then hopefully.... I think all of us would agree that our dream would be that people can own a home and take pride in that.

Moving people along that continuum, by providing access to affordable housing without undue barriers, what does that process look like for an individual, right now? Is that process feasible? Can someone reasonably expect to transition from a shelter, all the way down the continuum into affordable, independent housing that they own? If they cannot reasonably expect or dream for that, then what are the barriers that are in place that would prevent an individual from being able to enjoy that?

Ms. Martina Jileckova: Thank you for that question. It's a really good one. It's an interesting one. To me the answers all speak to the diversity of women who experience violence.

We can say that, ideally, home ownership is.... Some people will argue it's the ideal. Some people will say maybe do not strive for that.

However, let me answer in this way. All women who are fleeing violence and who find themselves in a shelter situation have one thing in common, and that is the threat of violence. Most of them will have some issue with finances. That's the affordability piece that comes into play. For some women, the affordability problem is relatively temporary. Their issue is the immediate threat they are fleeing. They will experience poverty that may be more temporary in nature. Once the immediate help is offered, they may be able to access resources through the partner from whom they're fleeing. Maybe they own a house already.

That's one sort of category. Sometimes that takes a while. There could be a court action and whatnot. It's not a simple process necessarily.

Other women who are fleeing violence have that immediate threat but their history of trauma goes back a long way. They are presenting at the shelters because they're homeless and have been for a long time, and now they have issues with addictions, perhaps mental health, and deep, deep trauma that has taken many years....

Those women are often in need of second-stage shelters, because there is a more complex need that needs to be addressed. We also find that just due to the history of the trauma they've experienced, they will need affordable rental housing once they leave even second-stage shelters for a longer period than those who, once they address the trauma, get on their feet a bit quicker.

That's an answer, simplified for the sake of being able to make the point, but you have, roughly, these two populations.

In terms of help, what we do is that we provide affordable rentals. That's what we know. We are the landlord with a heart. We provide affordable housing to women fleeing violence, and others, with supports. We work with partners in our community, such as Attainable Homes, to make sure that our residents, our tenants, know about the attainable home ownership programs out there in the community.

Our other partner is Habitat for Humanity. We make sure that those who stay with us understand that there are other options, provided that it fits with where they need to go next. People can stay with us permanently. We provide permanent, affordable housing and also provide access to other options such as attainable home ownership.

• (1700)

Ms. Rachael Harder: Can I ask what your funding model is? How are you sustained?

Ms. Martina Jileckova: Horizon Housing is the largest not-for-profit charity in Calgary that focuses on families, individuals, seniors and specialized populations, including women fleeing violence. There are larger providers in Calgary, but we are the largest in terms of owning our own portfolio. We own and operate our units. We are self-sustaining, in the sense that we basically are an owner and property manager that doesn't take profit. We charge affordable rents geared to income on a scale. Some of our rents are deep subsidy;

some are near market. We don't take profit from the rents that we charge. We run our portfolio and fund all our activities.

The Chair: Could I ask for just a point of clarification?

When you're talking about having a lower and a higher...would that be more of a co-operative model?

Ms. Martina Jileckova: It's one way to describe it. We call it integrated, inclusive housing. Our largest development is 200 units in a community in Calgary. Having that mixed community when it comes to incomes and needs creates a fiscally responsible environment. It's a building that sustains itself over a longer period of time, but it's also a socially responsible model.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

The Chair: Have you finished?

You can have more time, just because I need to write....

Ms. Rachael Harder: The chair stole some time, so Mr. Morrison, you have a minute.

• (1705)

Mr. Jeff Morrison: Just on the question you asked about home ownership, that's a very North American concept as well. In Canada, about 70% of Canadians are in the private home ownership market. About 25%, give or take, are renters. In comparison, in many European countries—take Germany, for example—only about 50% of the population are in the private home ownership market. There, and in many places in Europe, renting is seen as just as viable a home option.

For many Canadians, most particularly women fleeing violence, the real challenge is, frankly, not home ownership but just having a home, period, having a roof over their heads. I think the challenge for them is finding a safe, stable place where they can just claim that, whether it's owned or rented. Just finding a safe place to feel "that's home" is more the challenge, as opposed to actually having a deed to the property.

The Chair: Excellent, thank you very much.

We're now going to move over to Brigitte Sansoucy for seven minutes.

You have the floor.

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks as well to the witnesses, particularly for their effort to stay focused on the main topic of our study.

I have a few questions for the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association. Last May, your association's indigenous caucus published a document entitled "A For Indigenous, By Indigenous National Housing Strategy".

You discussed the concerns of the indigenous caucus, but I would like you to tell us more specifically about the barriers to access to indigenous housing, more particularly for indigenous women who are victims of violence.

Mr. Jeff Morrison: I'll start and then ask Ms. Krzeminska to continue if she has anything to add.

[English]

There's no question, as we said in our notes, that the housing challenges facing indigenous peoples, particularly in urban settings, are much greater than those facing the non-indigenous population. The rates of homelessness are much higher. The rates of indigenous families living in core housing need are much higher. The needs of indigenous peoples, most particularly indigenous women fleeing violence who move from a reserve setting to an urban setting, are very challenging. Oftentimes social, cultural and possibly linguistic support is lacking and is missing.

For indigenous women, moving to an urban setting without those supports—without access to housing—is a huge challenge. There are also some studies to document that there is housing discrimination that indigenous peoples face. There are studies that demonstrate that private landlords will often discriminate against an indigenous renter versus a non-indigenous renter. There are some systemic and cultural challenges that indigenous peoples face.

In the national strategy, all the measures that were announced are open to indigenous housing providers. What we've suggested in the document you've referenced is that the federal government needs to go one step further by announcing a fourth stream, an urban indigenous housing stream.

As you've correctly pointed out, we've entitled our strategy "A For Indigenous By Indigenous National Housing Strategy", the point being that it would need to be a strategy that is governed for and developed by urban indigenous peoples, including those with lived experience, so the governance structure would be in place. There needs to be access to greater financing, specifically for indigenous housing as well, so that would be over and above the monies announced in the strategy. There also needs to be those cultural supports. If you imagine an indigenous woman, one who has moved, say, to an urban setting, who doesn't have access to those cultural supports, she's going to have an extremely tough time.

The indigenous strategy would build on the existing national strategy but be obviously targeted to those indigenous women and men in need.

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you.

In March 2002, your association published a study entitled "On Her Own: Young Women and Homelessness in Canada".

In that document, you recommended that a broad primary prevention program "that would alleviate poverty and improve housing affordability, employment insurance eligibility, employment opportunities for youth, antiviolen programs and support service for victims, and developmental support for youth and families with children [would be] highly desirable."

Sixteen years later, what problems and barriers do women victims of violence still face?

Mr. Jeff Morrison: First, I'm very impressed that you unearthed a study that we did in 2002 and that I don't think I've seen.

●(1710)

[English]

As you know, Madame Sansoucy, a couple of months ago the federal government announced a national anti-poverty strategy that built on the measures that have been announced thus far by this government and put in place some measurements, some indices and some accountabilities within that strategy.

What we would argue is that the strategy contained nothing new in terms of direct measures to address and to fight poverty itself. We don't want to dismiss the efforts that have been made, including with the national housing strategy, to impact upon affordable housing, but I think we were disappointed that it was a case of, to quote the old commercial, "Where's the beef?" There really weren't those direct measures that we had hoped for that would be over and above those measures already announced.

Clearly women face increased rates of poverty, issues relating to education, and, as we've been discussing, the challenges of facing violence and so forth. We hope that as part of the anti-poverty measures the government will step forward with some additional direct measures, not just accountability or measurement-type activities but direct measures to influence and impact those things that would benefit women.

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives stated in a report that dates back to 2015, but is still relevant, that many women avoid shelters. These are mothers who are looking for safer solutions for their children, and families facing homelessness often fear they will have to deal with childhood and family services. If their children are taken into custody, the women may also be unable to keep their housing because they would lose a large portion of the income they are guaranteed from the employment assistance, income assistance, child tax benefits and employment insurance they probably depend on.

Has either of your organizations observed these situations? Do women try to avoid shelters because there might be negative consequences for them if they contacted the official services?

[English]

Ms. Martina Jileckova: Thank you.

The short answer is yes, we do. Women are very fearful, as you say, because if they find themselves in a shelter that is not specifically for women they face the real danger of losing their children. That's not necessarily the case when you are with the women-focused shelters and the second-stage housing that goes with them. They are geared to specifically keep families intact and together. You are correct.

In Calgary, we have a family shelter that is not necessarily for women fleeing violence. It's for any family that finds itself homeless. Again, it does the same job, keeping families together. That's a real issue. We, too, have some mechanisms in place such as shelters for women or family shelters that keep families together and prevent that from happening.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

We're now going to move over to Eva Nassif for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for your presentations.

I'll begin with you, Ms. Jileckova. You manage seven apartment buildings and eight group homes in Calgary, Alberta. You said you do business with women fleeing violence as well as with women who have mental and physical problems and persons living in poverty, including, obviously, women victims of violence.

What are the main reasons why tenants use your services and request assistance?

[*English*]

Ms. Martina Jileckova: If I understand your question correctly, who are the people who seek housing with us?

They are people who are of low income. Some of our individuals or families would live on limited incomes, which they may be on for the rest of their lives due to disabilities. Some of our residents will seek temporary affordable housing solutions with us and eventually when their situation improves they may be able to move on and perhaps even move to a home ownership situation. That's not the majority of our residents, but do we see it happen? Yes, we do.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: From what I've understood about your apartment buildings, housing demand exceeds supply. You said that wait times in Calgary were long. Mr. Morrison talked about that too in referring to the wait list in Montreal, Toronto and elsewhere. Many people need social housing.

What's the waiting time in Calgary, where your units are?

[*English*]

Ms. Martina Jileckova: Thank you for that question. I'm glad you asked.

In Calgary, I also happen to be a co-chair of the Community Housing Affordability Collective, which is a group of not-for-profit and private sector landlords in Calgary who come together to work on issues related to housing and bricks and mortar.

Just last month—this was work that we undertook over a period of about six months—we came up with a common vision for Calgary. We looked at the data and what we knew about the Calgary situation. In Calgary alone, we need 15,000 affordable rentals just to get to the national average. That's based on need in the community as identified by CMHC data and City of Calgary data. Those 15,000 affordable rentals are what we need to add to meet the national average in Calgary.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jeff Morrison: Elsewhere in Canada, wait times vary with the cities. It's not uncommon for people to wait years for a social housing unit.

[*English*]

Very briefly, I was in Manitoba last week where I heard a story from one housing provider who said that there was a senior woman who had been waiting for about four years for a housing unit in Winnipeg. She was next on the list, and when they called her and told her that they had a unit available, she broke down in tears. That situation is very common among housing providers.

Those wait-lists can be excessive. The times are excessive. When people are literally crying with joy because they are able to access a unit after waiting so long, it shows you that the demand is there.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Can you explain to us the differences between men and women who need housing? Do women face special problems or obstacles, or do they have specific requirements?

Mr. Jeff Morrison: Women obviously have substantial social housing needs.

[*English*]

I think the challenge facing many women fleeing violence is the added—and I'll choose my words carefully here—pressure of having children with them. Given that a lot of the available units may be smaller—a bachelor or a one-bedroom unit—if you have children and are waiting for a two-bedroom or a three-bedroom or, God forbid, a four-bedroom, the wait-lists are significantly longer. For women, especially after having gone through a traumatic experience of violence, living with a family in a one-bedroom or bachelor unit is not a fun experience.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Earlier you referred to the national housing strategy and the Canadian poverty reduction strategy. I'd like you to explain to us why they won't make a change. We invest millions of dollars to create affordable housing, and I'm hearing you say it makes no difference.

[English]

Mr. Jeff Morrison: Just to clarify, the national housing strategy announced in November 2017 by Minister Duclos was an absolutely groundbreaking moment. We welcomed it. We worked very closely on it with Minister Duclos and CMHC. It reinserted the federal government into social housing and that alone was a huge step forward. I want to clarify that it was for us a very big moment. There are some challenges with it, and we can talk about some of those, but overall, the national housing strategy was a big moment.

I believe the strategy I was referring to with Madame Sansoucy was the anti-poverty strategy that Minister Duclos announced three or four months ago. It was a step forward, but really, all it contained in terms of direct measures to impact poverty were announcements that had already been announced, other than some new measures and some new accountability frameworks. My point was simply that we had hoped the strategy would contain new measures directly to impact poverty, such as, for example, what we're recommending—increasing the Canada social transfer.

Just to clarify on the housing strategy, we absolutely believe it will have an impact on addressing poverty, especially for women.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to start our next round, and that's five minutes.

We'll start with Rachael Harder.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you very much.

I'm going to ask each of you the same question, and it is this. Those around this table are focused on a study having to do with access to shelter beds and access to the housing continuum. If you were to leave us with one final thought today that we should be sure to include in this report with regard to advocating for these women, their children and their futures, what would that one final thought be?

Ms. Lisa Litz: We're seeing a really promising shift in Calgary from a mindset that is about place-based provision of services for women—or anyone dealing with family violence—to something that is in the community and still provides social supports. I hope this committee will really continue to have a conversation about that piece.

Mr. Jeff Morrison: With the greatest of respect to this committee, I would suggest you change the focus of it. As we discussed, shelters are important and they play a role, but they are a band-aid. Shelters, especially for women fleeing violence, should not be seen as a solution. They should be seen as a step along the way. In terms of providing shelter for women fleeing violence, I would hope this committee would really focus on how we provide that ongoing access to safe affordable housing in the long term.

I know in many communities here in Ottawa, and I think in others, there have been some significant debates about shelters and about space for shelters in the communities. That's all fine and good, but some of these debates have missed that bigger picture question: Are shelters the right answer? Increasingly, I hope that people are concluding that they're not. They're temporary. They're a band-aid. We need to find the permanent fixes. Rather than trying to treat the

disease, let's cure it. We do so by providing that access to safe, affordable housing and increasing the supply of it alongside the supports to it.

I hope that this committee will recognize in your final report that that's really what the solution needs to be for the long term.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you very much to each of you for coming and sharing your words of wisdom today.

Do you want to weigh in? Please do.

Ms. Martina Jileckova: We agree with Jeff that it comes to the emphasis on accessible, affordable, community-based housing. We know this from our experience, and we heard it from our partner agencies, including those who provide shelters or second-stage shelters.

I don't want to call it a caveat, but I cannot think of any other word to say it. I would probably leave with you that there is a time and place for shelters. We agree with Jeff that they should not be the exclusive focus, but they do have a place—a role to play. They have to be extremely temporary. We don't like to see women staying in second-stage shelters for nine months when we know that once whatever issue is addressed they could be moving on in a month or two. We do see them as an important part of that continuum, but as a very temporary, perhaps band-aid, short-term solution. Once that immediate danger is addressed, we need to move women very quickly from the shelter situation or the second-stage housing—which is really a shelter—into permanent, supportive, affordable housing.

• (1725)

The Chair: Okay. Are we all good?

Dominika, we have about 30 seconds.

Ms. Dominika Krzeminska: Since everyone else was throwing something in, I just wanted to say that it's essential that the national strategies such as the national housing, homelessness, and poverty strategies all align with coordinated policies and programs. Violence against women should not be seen as separate from the homelessness system, the housing system, poverty reduction system, justice, etc. That would be my one take-away.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have our final line of questioning through Emmanuella Lambropoulos.

Emmanuella, you have five minutes.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Although my time is short, I would like to thank you all for being here with us today.

Sticking to the violence against women, we know that women going to shelters, like we said, is obviously a band-aid strategy. It's a solution that's very short term. Affordable housing is where we want them to end up, but there are so many things that happen in between for that transition to allow them to get there. Whether we increase the number of beds or we don't, these women still need extra support and not just a temporary place to stay, as we know.

What can you recommend for the government to do in terms of services offered at these transition homes or at these shelters? What do you think we should be funding, more than just infrastructure and beds?

Mr. Jeff Morrison: I think that question really underlies what we saw as the big missing piece from the national strategy. To answer that, I will respond by answering a question I was asked previously in another committee: Why shouldn't we just essentially hand over social and affordable housing to the private sector? They can deliver it more efficiently.

The answer has always been that, in the private sector, a housing unit is bricks and mortar. In our sector, it's bricks and mortar plus those social supports that are so essential. We are hopeful—and we will be calling for this over the next couple of months—that, as part of both the national housing strategy and the anti-poverty strategy, the big missing piece, which is some increased investment in social supports, can go hand in hand with that.

Increasing the Canada social transfer is probably one of the easier, less bureaucratic ways that the federal government could do that, ideally with some greater accountabilities on the part of provinces and territories. The federal government may wish to look at some direct federal-to-municipal transfers as well, given that municipalities play a key role in the provision of those kinds of health and social supports. It has been done in other sectors, and there's really no reason why a social support for municipalities couldn't also be considered by the federal government.

That's a key gap we need to discuss more. What role can the federal government play, and how can they more greatly support provision of those social supports?

Ms. Martina Jileckova: It's interesting, because I agree that we need emergency shelters and second-stage shelters for a very limited short period of time. What our partner agencies are telling us is that, once that immediate need is addressed, a woman with children is very successfully housed in community housing with supports. We no longer view the transitional second-stage housing as a progression, that thou shalt spend six months there because you are going through a program.

What we are finding really works in Calgary is that, once the immediate shelter need is addressed, moving women as soon as possible into community-based housing that's affordable with the supports still available is the most successful model.

It also happens to be more cost-effective in some ways, because you are no longer paying for a shelter bed if there's no immediate danger. You can take those dollars and, instead of putting them into operating shelter beds, which is traditionally not a cost-effective solution, you can house women in community housing such as Horizon and divert those dollars into social supports that are needed.

You ask what those are. There's lots we can do: financial supports, rent subsidies, financial literacy, life skills training, counselling for the trauma the women have gone through. Some women have a long history of family violence. Addictions and mental health issues may need to be addressed. We spoke about indigenous women, and they need cultural reconnections. We will move women into our housing, but they need that cultural reconnection that comes from social supports. Those are the types of supports that need to be funded.

We do believe that community-based housing with supports is a key to the solution.

• (1730)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much for being here once again. A lot of the women in my riding are of multicultural origins. There are a lot of immigrants in my riding. A lot of them don't necessarily know how the Canadian system works, how exactly to rent or buy a home and all of these things, so for sure these supports would be helpful.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That ends today's panel. I'd really like to thank Martina Jileckova, Lisa Litz, Jeff Morrison and Dominika Krzeminska.

Thank you so much. This has been a really informative panel. We really appreciate your coming.

We'll be meeting once again on October 24, this Wednesday, from 3:30 to 5:30, when we'll hear from the Beauséjour Family Crisis Resource Centre, the Haven Society, the YWCA of Lethbridge and District, and the YWCA of the Northwest Territories.

Today's meeting is adjourned. Thank you.

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