



Submitted to: The House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO)

Re: Study on Intimate Partner and Domestic Violence in Canada

March 2022

Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WomanACT) is a policy and planning body that has been working on system change to advance women's safety since 1991. WomanACT convenes policy makers, community organizations and survivors of violence to end violence against women through research, policy, education and community mobilization. On this basis, we advance two recommendations to the Standing Committee.

Recommendation 1: Advance the housing rights of survivors of violence, including the right to remain in their own home with the perpetrator removed.

Housing, homelessness and intimate partner violence are deeply connected. Violence is one of the main causes of homelessness and housing instability among women and children.ⁱ One Canadian study found that 75% of women and gender-diverse people experiencing homelessness had experienced violence and trauma in their lifetime.ⁱⁱ A lack of access to housing, in addition to a lack of access to income, can prevent survivors from leaving violent situations or lead them into precarious housing conditions. This puts survivors into at risk situations and often forces them to have to return to the violent home. According to the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, housing must be safe, which includes protection of women and girls against domestic violence.ⁱⁱⁱ Therefore, women living in situations of violence are also experiencing a direct violation of their right to housing.

There is increasing evidence that a broad range of culturally competent housing options for women fleeing violence will increase the likelihood of them re-establishing themselves safely as they can make a choice based on their individual needs.^{iv} Amongst these options, the right for women to remain in their homes safely must be upheld.

The Safe at Home housing model enables women fleeing violence to remain safely in their existing home or move directly to independent housing. Using a combination of legal tools, safety measures, and wraparound support services, Safe at Home programs work to remove the perpetrator from the home and reduce the risk of harm for women and their children. They involve a number of core partners working together, such as community agencies, the criminal justice system, housing providers, and child protection services. Safe at Home is a core housing option for survivors in places like Australia and the

United Kingdom, where it has been found to improve women's safety and wellbeing, prevent women's homelessness, and reduce incidents of intimate partner violence.

To advance the Safe at Home approach in Canada, WomanACT has been conducting research to better understand the policies, programs, and practices that support women to remain in their own home when leaving a violent relationship. Our research demonstrates that 80% of survivors reported first accessing a housing option that involved relocating from their home with the most common destinations being emergency shelters and staying with family or friends. Relocation had significant impacts on survivors' everyday lives. More than half of participants experienced a loss of control over their housing options, disruptions to their family and social relationships, and interruptions to service and amenity access. Our research also demonstrated that with the correct supports in place, 76% of survivors would prefer moving into a new home or remaining in their own home with the perpetrator removed when fleeing violence.^v

The Government of Canada has committed to realizing the right to housing. The realization of the right to housing will require fulfillment of survivors' right to housing, including the right to remain in their own home safely with the perpetrator removed. The realization of the right to housing will also require sufficient affordable housing, investment into different housing options, the prioritization of the housing needs for marginalized communities and those at risk of violence, and legislative measures that support survivors to live in their homes free from violence.

Recommendation 2: Resource interagency case management tables across Canada to coordinate interventions on high-risk intimate partner violence.

Femicide has increased in Canada during the pandemic. In 2021, 173 women and girls in Canada were killed violently, the majority of whom were killed by a current or former intimate partner.^{vi} Some populations are at greater risk of femicide and/or face unique barriers to safety. The rate of reported violent victimization among Indigenous women is three times higher than the rate of violent victimization reported by non-Indigenous women^{vii} and the rate of homicide is six times higher for Indigenous women compared to non-Indigenous women.^{viii} Women living in rural or remote communities are at greater risk of domestic violence^{ix} with contributing factors including lack of transportation and limited services and support.^x

There are identifiable risk factors for domestic violence that have been documented and research shows that the more risk factors present, the increased risk of homicide.^{xi} Because domestic homicides are often preceded by common risk factors, experts consider deaths related to intimate partner violence to be predictable and preventable.^{xii} Strategies, mainly risk assessment and management tools, have been developed to help identify cases at high risk and in need of the most immediate attention.^{xiii}

While there is a general understanding of risk factors and assessment tools, professionals and services lack procedures and multi-agency working to implement tools and support holistic interventions. Repeatedly, Domestic Violence Death Review Committees across Canada have recommended that community and government agencies collaborate on risk assessment and management to reduce exposure to further violence and to prevent deaths. Within an international context, multi-agency approaches have become a promising practice to reduce intimate partner homicide. In 2012, the United Nations recommended that countries establish formal multi-agency practices to effectively address intimate partner homicide.^{xiv}

Despite the recommendations, multi-agency high-risk intimate partner violence risk assessment and management in Canada is inadequately funded. The implementation of multi-agency approaches is not a new conversation in Canada. Two case studies conducted by the Government of Canada in 1986 and the early 1990s suggest that multi-agency approaches provide the strongest impact for addressing intimate partner violence.^{xv} While a few multi-agency responses to high-risk intimate partner violence exist, they are an inconsistent practice across Canada.^{xvi}

To advance the practice of multi-agency high-risk tables in Canada, WomanACT has been generating evidence-based practices and knowledge around multi-agency risk assessment and management of high-risk intimate partner violence and piloting a UK model to multi-agency risk assessment and response called Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). We have found that while there is an appetite to create multi-agency tables to address high risk intimate partner violence across Canada, communities face challenges related to resources and capacity.

Canada is in need of a standardized approach to sustainable investment in multi-agency responses for the prevention of the femicide. This would allow communities to implement interagency tables with dedicated time, strategy and evaluation.

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