

Aligning Our Work and Coordinating our Voices

Joint Planning Session of Children's Aid Societies / Violence Against Women (CAS/VAW) Advisory Committee, Transitional and Housing Support Program (THSP) Network, Violence against Women Network (VAWN) and the Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WomanACT)

**Report on Joint Planning Process and
Proceedings from June 2 Session
June 22, 2015**

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
PARTICIPANTS	2
CURRENT CONTEXT	3
ALIGNING OUR WORK AND COORDINATING OUR VOICES	6
Service Coordination	7
Advocacy	7
Strategic Initiatives	8
RESPONSES TO THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING STRATEGY CONSULTATION	9
General Feedback on the Overall Affordable Housing Strategy	9
Effectiveness of Legislation and Approach	9
Need to be Gender-Responsive	10
Specific Feedback on the Province’s Themes for An Affordable Housing Strategy	10
Theme 1: A sustainable supply of affordable housing	11
Theme 2: A fair system of Housing Assistance	12
Theme 3: Coordinated, accessible Support Services	12
NEXT STEPS—WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?	14
APPENDICES	16
Appendix A: Discussion paper	17
Appendix B: Notes from Discussion Groups	23
Appendix C: City of Toronto Housing Charter	25
Appendix D: Joint VAW Networks Affordable Housing Consultation Submission	26
Appendix E: Violence against Women Shelters of Toronto Network (VAWN) Position Paper	34

INTRODUCTION

The Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WomanACT), is a planning body that coordinates an efficient and effective approach to providing services for assaulted women and their families.

In this context, WomanACT coordinated a joint planning session took place on June 2, 2015, with members of the CAS/VAW Advisory Committee, the Transitional Housing and Support Program (THSP) Network, the Violence Against Women Network (VAWN), and Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WomanACT). The purpose of the all-day session was to address two broad questions:

- 1) Are there ways we can align our work better by mapping out who does what and improving communications among ourselves and more widely as a sector?
- 2) Can we provide coordinated input in response to the Provincial government's Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy Update due July 3?

In preparation for the session, WomanACT conducted a survey to gather the views of participants on these two questions in order to identify key themes and trends that would focus the discussion. The survey results were consolidated into a discussion paper and this was circulated prior to the all-day planning session.¹

The networks and committees represented at the session are closely aligned in both mission and mandates. They all work to end violence against woman and children through collaboration on the provision of services and by working to address systemic issues that perpetuate the conditions that put women and children at particular risk. These conditions include poverty, lack of safe and affordable housing, economic exploitation, failures of the justice system, and a popular and institutional culture that allows and sometimes condones the abuse of women and children.

While the networks and committees are closely aligned, opportunities now exist to take the collaboration and alignment to a new level: to develop further intentional structures and coordinated responses that will leverage the work of each network or committee to deliver maximum impact on the issues that all member organizations are seeking to address. The creation of a common point of contact with other related networks would serve to strengthen the collective efforts of all. Recognizing a world of increasing complexity and decreasing resources, organizations must work strategically and efficiently to make the best use of available resources.

¹ The discussion paper can be found in Appendix A of this report.

This is the start of a process, initiated by WomanACT, to identify ways to optimize the great wealth of expertise and experience represented by the organizations that make up the networks and committees of the VAW sector and its allies in Toronto.

PARTICIPANTS

The planning process involves representatives of four collaborative groups in Toronto that have been established to address the needs of women experiencing abuse and their children. The groups are made up of representatives from agencies working directly in the VAW sector or agencies who work in partnership with VAW agencies.

These groups are:

- CAS/VAW Collaboration Advisory Committee
- Transitional Housing and Support Program Network (THSP)
- Violence Against Women Network (VAWN)
- Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WomanACT)

The **CAS/VAW Collaboration Advisory Committee** is a community-based Advisory group that flows important information and recommendations to the Ministry and works across the CAS/VAW sector to increase collaboration and enhance service delivery for women and children. Membership in the Committee is organizational and includes representatives from signatory organizations or funders, namely the Ministry of Community and Social Services and Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Staff coordination and support to the Committee's work is provided by WomanACT.

The **Transitional Housing and Support Program (THSPN)** is a dynamic Network dedicated to promoting effective, consistent and high-quality responses that break the cycle of violence and address women's and children's need for safe and affordable housing and transitional support to ensure their safety and self-sufficiency. The Network is made up of representatives of organizations working for improved housing and transitional support services and responses for women and children experiencing violence in Toronto. Membership is organizational, not individual. The Network is made up of two standing committees (Workers and Managers) and three Task Teams (Housing, Economic Development, and Justice). Staff coordination and support to the Network is provided by WomanACT.

The Toronto Region **Violence Against Women Network (VAWN)** meets to discuss and act on emerging issues, policy, strategic directions and research as it affects women and their children who use the shelters, and the people who work in them. It is composed of a group

of women who are Executive Directors, Directors and Managers of 14 VAW Shelters from across the GTA.

VAWN is committed to supporting its members in the demanding work of managing shelters while also working towards systemic change to end violence against women. Staff coordination and is provided by a part-time position hired directly by the Network.

The **Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WomanACT)** is a policy development and planning body that coordinates an efficient and effective approach to providing services for assaulted women and their families. The general council is made up of senior level representatives of each of the key sectors in the community response to woman abuse. WomanACT is unique among the four groups in that its mandate is to develop a coordinated community response to woman abuse to promote systemic change and be more effective in promoting women's safety and holding abusers accountable. WomanACT acts as the coordinating body for agencies and services working in the VAW sector in Toronto.

The individuals participating in the joint planning session are co-chairs, chairs, council members, task team leads, and coordinators supporting the groups represented. All four of the above groups have clear mandates and comprehensive Terms of Reference that set out each group's agreed-upon ways of working, as well as strategic plans. The participants agree that what has yet to be developed is an overarching structure or framework with agreed upon ways of working to help the groups align their work and ensure ongoing and reliable communications. Such a structure would enable the four groups to act collectively and connect as a "group of groups" with other networks or groups to achieve common goals with regards to ending violence against women and children.

CURRENT CONTEXT

The participants identified a number of current realities that inform the need for coordinated action. The fact that woman abuse remains prevalent means more needs to be done to eradicate this devastating social problem. The interconnection between woman abuse and other women's equality issues needs to be reinforced in order to make real progress in the struggle to end violence against women. To achieve this, women's voices must be represented at various tables—poverty-reduction, affordable housing and mental health among others—to ensure a gender lens is applied to the conversations.

Woman abuse cannot be seen in isolation from the social factors that increase women's risk of violence. These factors include poverty, childhood sexual abuse, mental health and addictions, discrimination and racism, lack of safe and affordable housing, poor access to education and meaningful employment. Women continue to be financially disadvantaged making them dangerously dependent on their intimate partners or vulnerable to exploitation. Immigrant women sponsored by their partners and temporary foreign workers are at increased risk of being controlled and exploited. Human trafficking² is a growing problem, and includes Canadian women being forcibly removed from one part of the country to another, as well as women and girls being smuggled into Canada from outside the country for the purposes of sexual and other types of exploitation.

Aboriginal women are going missing and being murdered at a much higher rate than other women in Canada. Unique historical and social factors contribute to this situation as referenced in the recently released report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Yet the federal government continues to refuse to call a Public Inquiry into the matter, arguing that they are not prepared to turn the matter into a "sociological issue." They argue that it is as "law and order" issue and the criminal code and RCMP are equipped to handle it as such. This a glaring example of attempts, at the public policy level, to erode the connection between violence against women and the social, economic, cultural and historical factors that contribute to it.

In that vein, some new and troubling trends are being observed by workers in the VAW sector and allied organizations; for example, more women are being solely charged in the context of domestic violence, and more men are being awarded custody when women are residing in shelters. Participants expressed concerns that the health sector is not responding adequately to the issue of violence against women. And while Statistics Canada has reported on violence against women over the years, the reduction in Status of Women offices nationally means there is no coordinated gender-based voice speaking to the issues as we approach the upcoming federal election. On the contrary, both from a public policy perspective and in the public mind, it appears there is a campaign to suggest that women no longer need "special treatment" because equality has been achieved. Statistics on women's participation in postsecondary education or on boards of directors are trotted out as proof of this. Indeed, some men's groups are emerging to suggest that women are being favoured and that it is now men who are being treated unequally.³

² It was noted that human trafficking can also affect men and boys.

³ In March 2015, coinciding with International Women's Day and Premier Kathleen Wynne's announcement of the Province's three year sexual violence and harassment prevention strategy, Canadian Association For Equality (CAFE) launched a billboard campaign proclaiming "Half of domestic violence victims are men. No domestic violence shelters are dedicated to us"; and a twitter campaign #Let'sTalkMen.

Funding for prevention work which helps to address these broader social inequality factors, has been reduced and this could explain in part why the connection is being lost and why the voices opposing “special treatment” for women are gaining ground. To some participants, it feels as if we are losing traction in the struggle to end woman abuse and that the sector is having to expend valuable resources to fight to keep or recoup gains already won.

At the same time, there seems to be more tolerance of violence against women in popular culture (some call it a “rape culture”⁴) as evidence by the work of some popular artists. Recently in Toronto, successful public campaigns have been mounted to sanction performing artists who promote rape culture.

Participants note that in their experience, young women do not always recognize gender-based violence. This could be explained, in part, because young women from a very young age are inundated with messages that sexualize and objectify them; and also because there is no countervailing and coordinated publicly-supported campaign to raise their awareness of the issue. We need to see this situation as an invitation to bring new people into the movement for women’s equality and, where necessary, to re-invent feminism so that it is relevant to young women. We also have to recognize that young women themselves are speaking of feminism in new ways and we need to enter into a conversation with them about that.⁵

With the many challenges, the group also identified some opportunities in the current context to move the VAW agenda forward. While recent reports of female sexual assault and sexual harassment perpetrated by high profile celebrities and within highly respected public institutions represent a tragedy for the women involved, the heightened media attention these cases has focussed the public mind on the issue as perhaps never before. As well, recent publications documenting rape and rape culture on university campuses in Canada and the United States, have put the issue on the front burner for many who may not have given it a second thought before. There have also been more public education campaigns regarding violence against women in recent years presenting an opportunity to build on this momentum. All of this may have prompted Premier Kathleen

⁴ “A complex set of beliefs that encourage male sexual aggression and supports violence against women. It is a society where violence is seen as sexy and sexuality as violent. In a rape culture, women perceive a continuum of threatened violence that ranges from sexual remarks to sexual touching to rape itself. A rape culture condones physical and emotional terrorism against women as the norm... In a rape culture both men and women assume sexual violence as a fact of life, inevitable...However... much of what we accept as inevitable is in fact the expression of values and attitudes that can change.” Emilie Buchwald *Transforming A Rape Culture*, 1993

⁵ Sometimes referred to as Third Wave feminism.

Wynne recently to launch an action plan to stop sexual violence and harassment in the Province of Ontario. The campaign is called, “It’s Never Okay.”⁶

The convergence of these developments has opened up a public discussion about violence against women. This creates an opportunity for the VAW sector and its allies, as experts on the topic, to contribute meaningfully to the discussion. In particular, it is an opportunity to make the connection between violence against women and the social, economic, cultural and historical factors that promote it.

ALIGNING OUR WORK AND COORDINATING OUR VOICES

In preparation for the session, WomanACT conducted a survey to gather the views of participants on two important questions:

- 1) Are there ways we can align our work better by mapping out who does what and improving communications among ourselves and more widely as a sector?
- 2) Can we provide coordinated input in response to the Provincial government’s Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy Update due July 3?

The survey results were consolidated into a discussion paper and this was circulated prior to the all-day planning session.⁷

In the survey, participants were asked to identify outcomes they would hope to achieve by aligning their work and coordinating their voices. The list reflects outcomes that can best be achieved through a coordinated effort. The desired outcomes are:

- Better, more effective services
- Free up resources to do more for women and children
- Less confusion for clients and for staff
- Better public awareness and understanding of violence against women and children
- Consistency of messages
- Better public policy decisions
- VAW sector well prepared to inform government during consultations with the public in general

⁶ [Province of Ontario, “It’s Never Okay”](#)

⁷ The discussion paper can be found in Appendix A of this report.

- Sharing best practices

Further, respondents to the survey were asked to suggest specific ideas for how the four groups might align their work and improve communications. Many of the ideas were reinforced at the planning session. These are the suggestions from the survey.

- Strategic use of the coordinators' time at each network/committee
- Align voices/efforts on advocacy issues for a better collective impact
- Create communication strategies that are easy to maintain. Define common goals and common language.
- Share specific experiences of how things haven't worked, in terms of (in) consistency of outcomes when securing transitional housing for immigrant women and children.
- Annual sessions to come together
- Share meeting minutes
- Creating communication committees or task joint task teams
- Use of virtual meeting spaces, internet/social media
- Communication can be improved through email distribution, forums and position papers endorsement by the sector.
- Information back to WomanACT Council meetings and vice versa Information back to VAWN Table, CAS/VAW Table, and THSP Table and vice versa. TOR related to communications and advocacy roles

To implement these specific ideas and to assist the groups in achieving the desired outcomes, a way forward needs to be mapped out that will reflect the perspectives and priorities of the four groups. At the planning session, the participants focussed initially on three priority areas.

- Service Coordination
- Advocacy
- Strategic Initiatives

SERVICE COORDINATION

After further discussion and taking into account the resources required and complexities involved, it was agreed to focus for now on Advocacy and Strategic Initiatives and to leave Service Coordination for possible consideration at a future date.

ADVOCACY

Advocacy is central to the work of ending violence against women. The influencing of public policy and the shaping of public opinion need to be intentional and sustained to be successful in the new world of social media and mass information. The group agreed that

advocacy represents a rich opportunity for the kind of alignment and coordination under discussion. It is recognized that individual agencies within the various networks may have differing perspectives on some issues; therefore, developing a coordinated approach to advocacy will take careful thought and planning to receive buy in and be successful. Having said this, there are some elements of developing a coordinated approach to advocacy that the group wishes to recommend:

- Conduct an inventory of groups doing advocacy and identify potential advocacy partners
- Develop training resources to build skills in advocacy
- Foster relationships with media and with government
- Learn social media to become tech savvy and use social media to disseminate information effectively
- Develop a media/marketing plan



RECOMMENDATION

WomanACT take the lead in developing a “plan to get a plan” for advocacy across the Networks

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Strategic initiatives involve identifying current issues that are of common concern to all or most of the networks and that contain the potential to move the work of the networks forward in significant ways. A recent example of a strategic initiative undertaken in the sector is the *Policy Matters Report* produced through a partnership of WomanACT, Elizabeth Fry Toronto, and the Barbra Schlifer Clinic: an issue was identified, the problem defined, an approach developed and funding secured to do the work. The result was a report that provides a go-to reference that has potential improve the effectiveness of the work of the whole sector.

Strategic initiatives are by definition time-limited and respond to current conditions in order to move closer to a group’s goals. In developing ways to align work and coordinate voices, strategic initiatives represent an excellent opportunity for the VAW sector and its allies to collaborate in ways that will have greater impact. Planning and structure are vital if this collaboration is to be sustained, effective and consistent rather than *ad hoc*.

To begin the work of developing approaches to strategic initiatives, the group recommends some groundwork be done:

- Map the networks in terms of agencies, skills and resources
- Align the strategic plans of the four networks to see where common work is going on and to identify potential opportunities and funding sources

- Look at models already in use and research other possible models that could inform the common work⁸
- Youth Engagement may be an area that the networks would consider for strategic attention as a way to raise awareness and mobilize new energy for the sector
- Build in a framework for evaluation to ensure that efforts are achieving desired results to incorporate learnings for subsequent work



RECOMMENDATION

The staff coordinators of the 3 networks undertake the mapping of the networks and the aligning of the strategic plans.

RESPONSES TO THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING STRATEGY CONSULTATION

GENERAL FEEDBACK ON THE OVERALL AFFORDABLE HOUSING STRATEGY⁹

The Province's Vision for Long-Term Affordable Housing

"Every person has an affordable, suitable, and adequate home to provide the foundation to secure employment, raise a family, and build strong communities."

Response: There is general agreement with the vision but we would like to see safety and security added to the vision. It was also agreed that terms such as 'suitable' and 'adequate' are too vague. Respondents would like to see more specificity to these terms. The City of Toronto Housing Charter provides a clearer vision and the group would like to see something similar included in the Provincial Vision.¹⁰

There should be a provision that outlines clear definition of 'affordable', 'suitability' and 'adequate'. As well, clarify the level of standard which these terms are defined and

⁸ A number of examples were cited and can be found in the session notes in Appendix B of this report.

⁹ The Affordable Housing Strategy is given in these two documents: [Province of Ontario Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy](#); [Province of Ontario Consultation Discussion Guide](#)

¹⁰ Toronto Housing Charter: Opportunity for All, Aug 2009 is appended to this submission.

applied. A statement should include the principal of 'dignity' in relations to the standard of affordable and adequate housing.

Effectiveness of Legislation and Approach

Response: Half of our group does not feel the new affordable housing legislation is effective and a little less than half are not sure. No one said they think it is effective. Similarly, half do not think consolidating the five previous homelessness programs into one, locally-driven, flexible program has been effective; and half are not sure. No one said it has been effective. In terms of 'housing first' 41% agree with it but 50% are not sure.

This is important information to convey to the Province, since it may reflect a failure by either the Province or the Service Manager to communicate the effects of the new legislation to key stakeholders who are working with people affected directly by the legislation.

Need to be Gender-Responsive

Response: The most important message to the Province from this group of representatives of the VAW sector and its allies in Toronto, is the need for a gender lens to be applied to all aspects of the strategy. Women's housing needs are different from men's, and women experience homelessness differently from men. The solutions for women need to take these differences into account. The group does not feel the strategy does this.

In addition, we recommend that there is an increase in women led family friendly shared accommodation.

SPECIFIC FEEDBACK ON THE PROVINCE'S THEMES FOR AN AFFORDABLE HOUSING STRATEGY

Violence Against Women and Gender-Based Violence is a major cause of women's homelessness. In light of this, key considerations that underpin the group's response are: the importance of understanding the intersectionality of factors for women in need of housing; the need to take a holistic approach when providing housing for women experiencing violence; and the need for the Housing sector to increase its understanding of and capacity to respond to the dynamics of violence against women. This is necessary to ensure women receive fair and equitable access to the province's affordable housing programs.

Specific ideas concerning these key points are provided below under the Province's first three themes. The group chose not to provide specific responses to Theme 4;

however, the key considerations regarding the connection between violence against women and women's homelessness apply equally to Theme 4: A system based on Evidenced and Best Practices.

The Province is requesting input on four overarching themes:

- Theme 1: A sustainable supply of affordable housing
- Theme 2: A fair system of Housing Assistance
- Theme 3: Coordinated, accessible Support Services
- Theme 4: A system based on Evidence and Best Practices

Participants at the planning session determined that the most relevant themes for them to discuss were Themes 1-3. The discussion groups' suggested responses were endorsed by the whole group. The responses are provided here by theme. The actual proposed submission to the Province is provided in the appendix to this report.

■ Theme 1: A sustainable supply of affordable housing

To support Women and children who have experienced violence, the solution is not only to provide affordable housing but to have affordable units available. Currently, there is not an adequate supply of housing. The province of Ontario is known as the highest rate of poverty among new immigrants.

"The 260 units of affordable rental housing opened in 2013 represented a drop of 77% from 2012 (and 66% from 2011). Only 7 units built for affordable ownership were made available in 2013, 98% fewer than the previous year.²⁸⁸" (Toronto Community Foundation Vital Signs Report 2014)

We recommend that rent supplement program be expanded and provided to women and children who have experienced violence as priority. There should be incentives for private market units to participate in these programs and that the private units involved be put on a list and made public to service providers.

We further recommend that new condominiums being built that 5- 10% of building units should be designated to social housing.

In addition we recommend the need for increase transitional housing.

- Legislate dedicated low-rent units/units for women who experience violence in all new developments: public housing, private sector and hybrid. Look at existing

models that combine sustainability and housing e.g. Interval House (BESS and Her Home); Habitat for Humanity.

- Provide incentives to private sector landlords to dedicate affordable units.
- Fund VAW workers to negotiate with private landlords; some are already doing this with some success but with no funding or formal mandate.
- Address zoning to allow inclusionary housing—more mixed, with increase in RGI units.
- Examine critically other strategies for addressing the need for sustainable supply, such as City Homes, Tiny House models and Lane Way projects. There has been both concerns and recommendations expressed about some of these models, for example, the Tiny House models seemed to have occurred on the reserve and it failed due to no maintenance, concerns were expressed about how the model did not meet a standard of dignity and it's not a sustainable model.
- Create a spectrum of housing-not 'one size fits all.'
- If safe and appropriate, provide supports to women who would prefer to stay in their own homes, there should be collaboration with social assistance to provide subsidy to maintain her unit. This could result in a reduction of pressure on the housing supply.
- Develop a **national housing strategy** with a dedicated budget for municipalities to maintain their social housing stock in good repair.

■ Theme 2: A fair system of Housing Assistance

- The word “fair” is recommended to be change to “equitable housing”
- Build more housing with more choice that is also:
 - Clean, safe, well-maintained
 - Accessible
 - Takes into account the importance of location in the realities of a woman's life
- Keep a VAW lens on the issue: lack of housing impacts women in particular ways. “Fairness” needs to be understood in light of this.
- Special Priority (SP) Program waiting list is too long. As a result, women experiencing violence may be put at greater risk. The introduction of interviews for Special Priority status lengthens the time required and suggests a lack of trust between housing providers and VAW sector. If interviews are to be continued, resources need to be allocated to help women with the added costs, such as transportation and child care.

- Training in anti-oppression and all aspects of domestic violence should be required for housing providers/housing staff.
- More transparency and accountability around the access process is needed among housing providers.
- More resources are needed to speed up the applications process.
- The system should prioritize women experiencing violence, the homeless and the precariously housed.
- A better understanding is needed in the Housing sector of the impact of issues such as mental health, children, harm reduction, addictions, etc. on people's ability to maintain their housing. Should be taking a holistic approach. Look at national and international best practices.
- More outreach services are needed as well as supports that are appropriate to address the needs of women and, in particular, lesbian women in shelters.
- Improve access to education.
- Build Community and Community Engagement; strengthen tenant and resident organizations.
- Ministries need to work more effectively in partnership i.e. Ministry of Community and Social Services (Social Assistance) with Ministry of Housing.
- Need an assets/strengths-based approach to policy development as well as gender lens on policy development.
- The process of interviewing is traumatizing. In fact Peel housing has implemented this strategy and it has not positively impacted women and children but in fact created further barriers, which encompass a practice of discriminatory, subjectivity and oppressive. This practice institutes a culture of fear. Women are tested to prove they have experienced violence. This does not create an environment of dignity.
- We recommend that new housing process be accessible and provided in various formats due to the fact all women do not have access to technology and language barriers might be present
- We recommend all changes to housing process and legislation be made accessible and public

■ Theme 3: Coordinated, accessible Support Services

- There needs to be a gender-based analysis at the forefront of housing services for victims of violence.
- A systematic effort is needed to address and dismantle barriers to access safe and affordable housing and VAW support services to prevent eviction.

- Centralized Intake managed by the VAW sector to handle VAW calls and coordinate the services needed would speed up the process for services and access, with an understanding of the intersectionality of other factors:
 - Poverty
 - Immigration
 - Child care
- Need to design a comprehensive/holistic model of service taking into consideration services already provided such as Transitional Housing and Support Program, Counselling, Mental Health, Employment Skills, etc.
- Social priority include women who experience violence abroad (In different countries)
- We recommend emphasizing integrated community support system model with women and children at the centre.

Homelessness to Housing Continuum



Based on input from Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

NEXT STEPS—WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

There was consensus among the participants that there is value in the four networks continuing to work at this level to align their work and coordinate their voices. Creating a reliable and consistent infrastructure will enable the networks and their member agencies to better influence public policy and public opinion, to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and best practice within the sector, and to make the best use of limited resources.

The Provincial Affordable Housing Strategy Consultation deadline for input is July 3. The groups' responses will be formed into a simple submission which will be submitted in the names of the people present at the June 2 planning session. The proposed submission is provided in the appendix to the report. It was also agreed that the VAWN submission will be appended to this report and that the two submissions will reference each other.

The participants agreed to circulate this report containing the results of the joint planning session to their respective networks over the coming months and to reconvene as a group by the end of the fiscal year.

APPENDICES

- ▣ Appendix A Discussion paper
- ▣ Appendix B Notes from Discussion Groups
- ▣ Appendix C City of Toronto Housing Charter
- ▣ Appendix D Proposed submission on behalf of the participants at the June 2 planning session.
- ▣ Appendix E Violence against Women Network (VAWN) Submission to the Affordable Housing Strategy Consultation.

Appendix A: Discussion paper

Aligning Our Work and Coordinating our Voices

Joint Planning Session of Children Aid Societies/Violence Against Women (CAS/VAW) Advisory Committee, Transitional and Housing Support Program (THSP) Network, Violence against Women Network (VAWN) and the Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WomanACT)

Discussion Paper for June 2 Session

May 28, 2015

INTRODUCTION

In April 2015, the idea of a joint planning session with CAS/VAW Advisory Committee, Transitional Housing and Support Program Network, Violence Against Women Network, and Woman Abuse Council of Toronto, was proposed and agreed to.

The session, to be held on June 2 at Children's Aid Society of Toronto, will address the following two broad questions:

- 1) Are there ways we can align our work better by mapping out who does what and improving communications among ourselves and more widely as a sector
- 2) Can we provide coordinated input in response to the Provincial government's Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy Update due July 3;

In preparation for the June 2 session, a survey was conducted to gather the views of participants on the two broad questions with the goal of identifying key themes and trends to focus and guide the discussion.

Thanks to everyone who completed the survey. 12 people responded. Your answers were really helpful in confirming and/or clarifying what you would like to focus on in the June 2 session.

This paper presents the key findings from the survey as they relate to the goals of the day. It also contains suggestions, based on the survey results, for the topics and/or questions that look to be most important to you to spend the time on. We will confirm all this at the start of the June 2 session.

Keep in mind, however, that nothing is lost. The fact that you have these results about a number of possible areas of alignment and coordination, means that later you can go back pick up on other questions or topics as you continue to work to align your work and improve

communications. It is hoped that this session represents the beginning of a conversation that the four networks will develop over the coming months and years.

KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

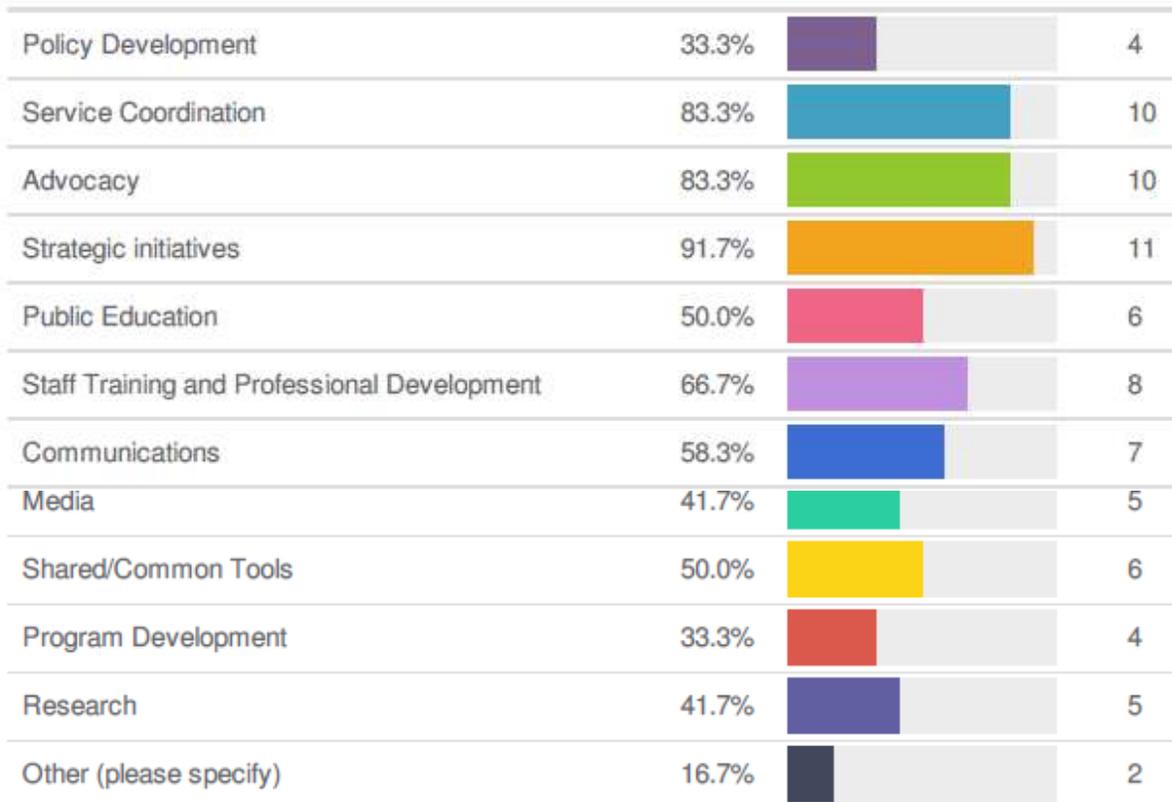
Outcomes for the Day

In terms of the outcomes that you would like to achieve with this day, everyone (100%) said they would like to see ideas for how you can align your work. The next two outcomes were equal with 92% of people saying they wanted to: achieve agreement on a common set of responses that you can develop into a submission for the provincial affordable housing consultation; and generate ideas for how we can improve communications among our members and between the networks represented.

Key Findings about Aligning your Work and Improving Communications

Of all the options offered in the survey for intentional collaboration, the three consistently highest selected were:

- Service Coordination
- Advocacy
- Strategic Initiatives



Fundraising

Problem Solving as a Sector/Proactive rather than Reactive structures to provide input into legislative and procedural changes impacting women.

Aligning our Work and Coordinating our Voices

It is important to note that you did not say that the other options are unimportant, just that these three were far above all the others. This gives you a place to start where there is so much consensus. A few others options were suggested by some of you and these can be added to the list. As mentioned before, none of these ideas needs to be lost. You can come back to these topics at a later time as you continue to align your work.

It is important to have some idea of what are you trying to achieve by aligning your work and coordinating your voices. In other words, what would success look like? This is why, in the survey, we asked about desired outcomes for your collaboration. This is how you responded to the question about desired outcomes of your collaborations:

- Better, more effective services (10)
- Free up resources to do more for women and children (9)
- Less confusion for clients and for staff (9)
- Better public awareness and understanding of violence against women and children (9)
- Consistency of messages (8)
- Better public policy decisions (7)
- Other (please specify) (2)

We asked you for specific ideas for how you might align your work and improve communications. Here is what you said...

- Strategic use of the coordinators' time at each network/committee
- Align their voices/efforts on advocacy issues for a better collective impact
- Create communication strategies that are easy to maintain. Define common goals and common language.
- Sharing specific experiences of how things haven't worked, in terms of (in) consistency of outcomes when securing transitional housing for immigrant women and children.
- Annual sessions to come together
- Share meeting minutes
- Creating communication committees or task joint task teams
- Meetings, internet/social media
- Communication can be improved through email distribution, forums and position papers endorsement by the sector.
- Information back to WomanACT Council meetings and Vice versa
Information back to VAWN Table, CAS/VAW Table, and THSP Table and Vice versa. TOR related to communications and advocacy roles

Key Findings about the Province's Affordable Housing Strategy Consultation

It may be of interest to note that 50% of those responding to the survey are service providers only; 25% are both housing and service providers; and 25% are neither (i.e. coordinating bodies/committees).

In terms of the new affordable housing legislation more than half of you do not think it is effective and a little less than half of you are not sure. No one said they think it is effective. Similarly, half of said you do not think consolidating the five previous homelessness programs into one, locally-driven, flexible program has been effective; and half of you said you are not sure. No one said it has been effective.

Almost 60% of you are familiar with the City of Toronto's Local Housing and Homelessness Plan and a little over 40% said they are not. 8% of you said your agency was consulted in the development of the City of Toronto Plan, 42% said your agency was not consulted and 50% are not sure.

In terms of a "Housing First" approach, 42% support it, 8% do not; 50% are not sure. Some of the concerns expressed are: gender-responsiveness that incorporates other components; and adequate supports that will make it possible for people to sustain their housing and avoid eviction.

92% of you agree with the provinces' vision for its affordable housing strategy:

Every person has an affordable, suitable, and adequate home to provide the foundation to secure employment, raise a family, and build strong communities.

But many of you added that you would like to see safety and security added to the vision.

Of the four themes that the Province is asking for input on:

- Theme 1: A sustainable supply of affordable housing
- Theme 2: A fair system of Housing Assistance
- Theme 3: Coordinated, accessible Support Services
- Theme 4: A system based on Evidence and Best Practices

The largest number of you said Theme 2 and Theme 3 were the most relevant to discuss on June 2. When ranking the themes by importance Theme 1 came out first; but since most of you are not housing providers, it appears you thought this was less relevant to discuss on June 2. Theme 4 was consistently in last place.

SUGGESTIONS FOR JUNE 2

On June 2 we have 6 hours (9:30-12:30; 1:00-4:00) to complete the tasks you have set. Since the larger question of aligning your work and coordinating your voices on an ongoing basis is a bigger project, we suggest that we spend more time on this task. Having said that, the work of

Aligning our Work and Coordinating our Voices

developing a common set of responses on the Affordable Housing Strategy, is an opportunity for the four networks/committees to work together on a specific issue and see how it goes.

We are proposing that we divide the time available as follows: 4 hours for developing ideas for aligning work and improving communications and 2 hours for the Affordable Housing Strategy.

The larger amount of time will be spent on developing ideas for how to align your work and how to improve communications. It is recommended that for the June 2 session, we focus the conversation around the three topics that received the most support in the survey, namely:

- Service Coordination
- Advocacy
- Strategic Initiatives

We will design a process for you to discuss these three topics with the goal of identifying concrete ways both to align your work and to improve communications on these topics. We will be looking for structural and process ideas that will allow you to carry the work forward. We also suggest that time be left at the end of the day to confirm next steps and identify who will do what by when.

For the affordable Housing Strategy, we propose that you focus on the 2 themes that the survey showed are most relevant to you, namely:

Theme 2: A fair system of Housing Assistance

Theme 3: Coordinated, accessible Support Services

The groups will work on the questions provided by the province and report back to the large group. We will confirm the areas on which there is agreement and that will form the basis for the submission to the province.

The province's consultation method is quite informal and allows for submissions to be made by email, fax, regular mail and by telephone. It will be good if all four networks could approve in principle the content that we agree to on June 2. We will take some time before the end of the day, to discuss how your network would like to be represented on the submission.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

In preparation for the June2 session, we are asking you to take some time to think further about and, if possible, discuss with others, the following questions:

1. What are some short, medium and long term strategies that can be implemented to support coordination between the three Networks and WomanACT?
2. As the VAW sector representatives, what structure(s) could we put in place to ensure we have a proactive response and input into changes in legislation, policy and practices impacting victims of violence?

Thank you again for your participation so far in making the June 2 planning session a success. We look forward to a great day that is both productive and fun!

Appendix B: Notes from Discussion Groups

1. Service Coordination

No example of SC provided

3 months	Information sharing/communication
6 months	Mapping of who is doing what to be done by coordinators using a template Share current resources - coordinators
Long-term	Agreement of General Principles for service provision Accountability

2. Strategic Initiatives

Examples of strategic initiatives that the groups have been involved with to date include:

- SPIDER- City of Toronto
- Poverty Reduction Strategy-City of Toronto
- Toronto Youth Equity Strategy- City of Toronto
- Toronto Newcomer Strategy- City of Toronto
- Community consultations
- Research initiatives
- Models and frameworks (e.g. Sustainable Livelihoods, Matrix, Five Fingers)
- VAW sector involvement at tables that are consultative

3 months	Mapping the networks and develop inventories; mapping opportunities Strategic plan for networks on systemic advocacy Examine partnerships/models Coordinated effort re housing Examine funding opportunities within budgets/strategies (gov't \$) Identify opportunities within the 4 networks and examine funding Academic research/evaluation partnerships –students/resources Mapping those connections Youth engagement
12 month	Evaluate the process Examining outcomes of report Advocacy Submission model adapted to the City/municipal/provincial level Communications- developing positions statements around shared goals/ objectives Examine all strategic plans for all networks to see overlaps-share

3. Advocacy

- Examples of advocacy initiatives already underway:
- BBW-Provincial
- OAITH
- Raise the Minimum Wage (Workers Action Centre)
- No One is Illegal
- Human Trafficking-FCJ Refugee/CCR/Centre for Spanish Speaking People
- Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC)
- Sexual Harassment - province
- Long-term Affordable Housing
- Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women (and 1/3 of prison population)

Aligning Work on Advocacy

3 months	Identify groups/leadership addressing above issues How are they connected to our networks? Engage in social media with these groups Follow and disseminate information to these groups
12 months	Big Data/Research Sector to become tech savvy/involved in social media Media & Marketing Group –public voice for hot topics/news Build a relationship with the media Training public speaking/media Training social media Training-how to carry out strategic advocacy Build list of advocacy opportunities
2 years	Foster relationships

Improving Communications on Advocacy

1. Be part of the conversation-engage
2. Use message boards to share information
3. Newsletters (existing)
4. Quarterly network meetings (like this one)
5. Link each other on our websites

Appendix C: City of Toronto Housing Charter



Toronto Housing Charter Opportunity for All

Policy Statement:

It is the policy of the City of Toronto that fair access to a full range of housing is fundamental to strengthening Toronto's economy, its environmental efforts, and the health and social well-being of its residents and communities.

In that regard:

All residents should have a safe, secure, affordable and well-maintained home from which to realize their full potential.

All residents should be able to live in their neighbourhood of choice without discrimination.

All residents, regardless of whether they rent or own a home, or are homeless, have an equal stake and voice in Toronto's future.

All residents have the right to equal treatment in housing without discrimination as provided by the Ontario Human Rights Code, and to be protected from discriminatory practices which limit their housing opportunities.

All housing in Toronto should be maintained and operated in a good and safe state of repair.

Implementation:

The Toronto Housing Charter – Opportunity for All is designed to guide City Council and the City's public service in the provision of services and programs to residents.

The City of Toronto will consult and work with the Ontario Human Rights Commission to support the housing rights of residents and to advance the policies contained in the *Toronto Housing Charter*.

The City of Toronto will from time to time review the Toronto Housing Charter to reflect any amendments to complementary policies including Toronto's Official Plan, the Human Rights and Anti-Harassment Policy, and the Vision Statement on Access, Equity and Diversity.

David Miller
Mayor

Councillor Giorgio Mammoliti
Chair, Affordable Housing Committee

August 5, 2009

Appendix D: Joint VAW Networks Affordable Housing Consultation Submission



The Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WomanACT), is a planning body that coordinates an efficient and effective approach to providing services for assaulted women and their families.

In this context, WomanACT coordinated a joint planning session took place on June 2, 2015, with members of the Children Aid Societies/Violence against Women (CAS/VAW) Collaboration Advisory Committee, the Transitional Housing and Support Program (THSP) Network, the Violence Against Women Network (VAWN), and Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WomanACT).

Although the preparation of this submission was coordinated by the Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WomanACT), it reflects the views of representatives of four collaborative groups that are working in the VAW sector in Toronto, to address the needs of women experiencing abuse and their children. These groups are:

- CAS/VAW Collaboration Advisory Committee
- Transitional Housing and Support Program Network (THSP)
- Violence Against Women Network (VAWN)
- Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WACT)

The **CAS/VAW Collaboration Advisory Committee** is a community-based Advisory group that flows important information and recommendations to the Ministry and works across the CAS/VAW sector to increase collaboration and enhance service delivery for women and children. Membership in the Committee is organizational and includes representatives from signatory organizations or funders, namely the Ministry of Community and Social Services and Ministry of Children and Youth Services.

The **Transitional Housing and Support Program (THSPN)** is a dynamic Network dedicated to promoting effective, consistent and high-quality responses that break the cycle of violence and address women's and children's need for safe and affordable housing and transitional support to ensure their safety and self-sufficiency. The Network is made up of representatives of organizations working for improved housing and transitional support services and responses for women and children experiencing violence in Toronto. Membership is organizational not individual. The Network is made up of two standing committees (Workers and Managers) and three Task Teams (Housing, Economic Development, and Justice).

The Toronto Region **Violence Against Women Network (VAWN)** meets to discuss and act on emerging issues, policy, strategic directions and research as it affects women and their children who use the shelters, and the people who work in them. It is composed of a group of women who are Executive Directors, Directors and Managers of 14 VAW Shelters from across the GTA.

Aligning our Work and Coordinating our Voices

VAWN is committed to supporting its members in the demanding work of managing shelters while also working towards systemic change to end violence against women.

The VAWN has prepared a position paper for the consultation, which is attached to this document and will be submitted jointly with WomanACT's document (Appendix E)

The **Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WomanACT)** is a policy development and planning body that coordinates an efficient and effective approach to providing services for assaulted women and their families. The 30 person general council is made up of senior level representatives of each of the key sectors in the community response to woman abuse. WomanACT is the coordinating body for agencies and services working in the VAW sector in Toronto.

Together, these networks represent over 30 agencies who work in or with the VAW sector and whose work is significantly impacted by the affordable housing strategy.

The individuals contributing to the submission are co-chairs, chairs, council members, task team leads, and coordinators supporting the groups represented.

RESPONSES TO THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING STRATEGY CONSULTATION

General Feedback on the Overall Affordable Housing Strategy

The Province's Vision for Long-Term Affordable Housing

"Every person has an affordable, suitable, and adequate home to provide the foundation to secure employment, raise a family, and build strong communities."

Response: There is general agreement with the vision but we would like to see safety and security added to the vision. It was also agreed that terms such as 'suitable' and 'adequate' are too vague. Respondents would like to see more specificity to these terms. The City of Toronto Housing Charter provides a clearer vision and the group would like to see something similar included in the Provincial Vision.¹¹

There should be a provision that outlines clear definition of 'affordable', 'suitability and 'adequate'. As well, clarify the level of standard which these terms are defined and applied. A statement should include the principal of 'dignity' in relations to the standard of affordable and adequate housing.

Effectiveness of Legislation and Approach

Response: Half of our group does not feel the new affordable housing legislation is effective and a little less than half are not sure. No one said they think it is effective. Similarly, half do not think consolidating the five previous homelessness programs into one, locally-driven,

¹¹ Toronto Housing Charter: Opportunity for All, Aug 2009 is appended to this submission.

flexible program has been effective; and half are not sure. No one said it has been effective. In terms of 'housing first' 41% agree with it but 50% are not sure.

This is important information to convey to the Province, since it may reflect a failure by either the Province or the Service Manager to communicate the effects of the new legislation to key stakeholders who are working with people affected directly by the legislation.

Need to be Gender-Responsive

Response: The most important message to the Province from this group of representatives of the VAW sector and its allies, is the need for a gender lens to be applied to all aspects of the strategy. Women's housing needs are different from men's and women experience homelessness differently from men; therefore, the solutions for women need to take these differences into account. The group does not feel the strategy does this.

In addition, we recommend that there is an increase in women led family friendly shared accommodation.

Specific Feedback on the Province's Themes for the Affordable Housing Strategy

Violence Against Women and Gender-Based Violence is a major cause of women's homelessness. In light of this, key considerations that underpin the group's response are: the importance of understanding the intersectionality of factors for women in need of housing; the need to take a holistic approach when providing housing for women experiencing violence; and the need for the Housing sector to increase its understanding of and capacity to respond to the dynamics of violence against women. This is necessary to ensure women receive fair and equitable access to the province's affordable housing programs.

Specific ideas concerning these key points are provided below under the Province's first three themes. The group chose not to provide specific responses to Theme 4; however, the key considerations regarding the connection between violence against women and women's homelessness apply equally to Theme 4: A system based on Evidenced and Best Practices.

■ Theme 1: A sustainable supply of affordable housing:

To support Women and children who have experienced violence, the solution is not only to provide affordable housing but to have affordable units available. Currently, there is not an adequate supply of housing. The province of Ontario is known as the highest rate of poverty among new immigrants.

"The 260 units of affordable rental housing opened in 2013 represented a drop of 77% from 2012 (and 66% from 2011). Only 7 units built for affordable ownership were made available in 2013, 98% fewer than the previous year.²⁸⁸" (Toronto Community Foundation Vital Signs Report 2014)

We recommend that rent supplement program be expanded and provided to women and children who have experienced violence as priority. There should be incentives for private market units to participate in these programs and that the private units involved be put on a list and made public to service providers.

We further recommend that new condominiums being built that 5- 10% of building units should be designated to social housing.

In addition we recommend the need for increase transitional housing.

- Legislate dedicated low-rent units/units for women who experience violence in all new developments: public housing, private sector and hybrid. Look at existing models that combine sustainability and housing e.g. Interval House (BESS and Her Home), Habitat for Humanity.
- Provide incentives to private sector landlords to dedicate affordable units.
- Fund VAW workers to negotiate with private landlords; some are already doing this with some success but with no funding or formal mandate.
- Address zoning to allow inclusionary housing –more mixed, with increase in RGI units
- Examine critically other strategies for addressing the need for sustainable supply, such as City Homes, Tiny House models and Lane Way projects. There has been both concerns and recommendations expressed about some of these models, for example, the Tiny House models seemed to have occurred on the reserve and it failed due to no maintenance, concerns were expressed about how the model did not meet a standard of dignity and it's not a sustainable model.
- Create a spectrum of housing-not 'one size fits all.'
- If safe and appropriate, provide supports to women who would prefer to stay in their own homes, there should be collaboration with social assistance to provide subsidy to maintain her unit. This could result in a reduction of pressure on the housing supply.
- Develop a **national housing strategy** with a dedicated budget for municipalities to maintain their social housing stock in good repair.

■ Theme 2: A fair system of Housing Assistance

- The word "fair" is recommended to be change to "equitable housing"
- Build more housing with more choice that is also:
 - Clean, safe, well-maintained
 - Accessible
 - Takes into account the importance of location in the realities of a woman's life

- Keep a VAW lens on the issue: lack of housing impacts women in particular ways. “Fairness” needs to be understood in light of this.
- Special Priority (SP) Program waiting list is too long. As a result, women experiencing violence may be put at greater risk. The introduction of interviews for Special Priority status lengthens the time required and suggests a lack of trust between housing providers and VAW sector. If interviews are to be continued, resources need to be allocated to help women with the added costs, such as transportation and child care.
- Training in anti-oppression and all aspects of domestic violence should be required for housing providers/housing staff.
- More transparency and accountability around the access process is needed among housing providers.
- More resources are needed to speed up the applications process.
- The system should prioritize women experiencing violence, the homeless and the precariously housed.
- A better understanding is needed in the Housing sector of the impact of issues such as mental health, children, harm reduction, addictions, etc. on people’s ability to maintain their housing. Should be taking a holistic approach. Look at national and international best practices.
- More outreach services are needed as well as supports that are appropriate to address the needs of women and, in particular, lesbian women in shelters.
- Improve access to education.
- Build Community and Community Engagement; strengthen tenant and resident organizations.
- Ministries need to work more effectively in partnership i.e. Ministry of Community and Social Services (Social Assistance) with Ministry of Housing.
- Need an assets/strengths-based approach to policy development as well as gender lens on policy development.
- The process of interviewing is traumatizing. In fact Peel housing has implemented this strategy and it has not positively impacted women and children but in fact created further barriers, which encompass a practice of discriminatory, subjectivity and oppressive. This practice institutes a culture of fear. Women are tested to prove they have experienced violence. This does not create an environment of dignity.
- We recommend that new housing process be accessible and provided in various formats due to the fact all women do not have access to technology and language barriers might be present
- We recommend all changes to housing process and legislation be made accessible and public

■ Theme 3: Coordinated, accessible Support Services

- There needs to be a gender-based analysis at the forefront of housing services for victims of violence.
- A systematic effort is needed to address and dismantle barriers to access safe and affordable housing and VAW support services to prevent eviction.
- Centralized Intake managed by the VAW sector to handle VAW calls and coordinate the services needed would speed up the process for services and access, with an understanding of the intersectionality of other factors:
 - Poverty
 - Immigration
 - Child care
- Need to design a comprehensive/holistic model of service taking into consideration services already provided such as Transitional Housing and Support Program, Counselling, Mental Health, Employment Skills, etc.
- Social priority include women who experience violence aboard (In different countries)
- We recommend emphasizing integrated community support system model with women and children at the centre.

Homelessness to Housing Continuum



Based on input from Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Conclusion

Those whose views are reflected in this submission, wish to convey their thanks to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for seeking input on the Province’s Affordable Housing Strategy. This issue impacts the women we serve profoundly and it continues to present a significant obstacle to women and their children living lives free from violence and abuse. We hope that by providing the perspective of the VAW sector and its allies on this critical issue for women and their children, we will have helped the Province move closer to its vision for Long Term Affordable Housing.

If you have any questions or wish clarification of anything in this submission, please contact Harmacy Mendoza Executive Director, WomanACT using the contact information below.

Aligning our Work and Coordinating our Voices

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Appendix E: VAWN Affordable Housing Consultation Submission